STORIES OF LOVE COURAGE AND COMPASSION

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STORIES

OF

LOVE

COURAGE

AND

COMPASSION

BOOKS BY

WARWICK DEEPING

Sorrell and Son

Doomsday

Kitty

Uther and Igraine

Old Pybus

Roper's Row

Exile

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STORIES OF LOVE, COURAGE AND COMPASSION

WARWICK DEEPING

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STORIES OF LOVE,
COURAGE AND COMPASSION

Wilmer's Wife

I

WILMER WAS SITTING IN FRONT OF THE FIRE, HIS ELBOWS ON his knees, his fists under his chin. His slippers lay on the hearth-rug just as he had kicked them off. His pipe had gone out, but he held it gripped between his teeth.

"What a mockery!" he thought, and glanced at the empty chair beside him.

It was a very ordinary arm-chair, upholstered in blue tapestry, with rolled arms and a comfortable sloping back. A green cushion lay on the seat, and as Wilmer glanced at it a flicker of pain seemed to pass across his face. It had been his wife's chair, and that green cushion had formed the familiar halo behind her bronze-brown head.

He stared at the cushion.

His wife had been dead for a year. She lay in that North London cemetery, deep in the dreary clay of it, and she had died just before he had become so fatuously famous.

For his fame was fatuous, since it had come to Wilmer when it had ceased to matter, when it was useless, and he had ceased to care.

Had it come a year earlier how different things might have been.

The house-bell rang. He heard the maid go to the door, and a moment later she was looking kindly at the bent back of him and holding out his letters.

"Letters, sir."

"Put them on the table, Mary."

"Shall I turn on the light, sir?"

"No; don't bother."

She went out, closing the door gently, with pity in her pleasant, unsubtle eyes. "Poor gentleman, he had taken it to heart;" and Wilmer sat there, staring at the fire, that most lonely and lost of

creatures, a man whose soul-mate had vanished and left him in the darkness.

Presently he turned and picked up the letters. There were quite a number of them, a proof of the public's delight in one of its latest pets. Wilmer glanced perfunctorily at the envelopes, bending down before the firelight, with his thin and sensitive face lit up by the glow. What a budget! Letters from enthusiastic young ladies beseeching him for an autograph. Another letter from a titled person asking him to present her with some of his books to be sold at a charity bazaar. Yet another letter from a cinematograph company, desiring to be informed whether the film rights of his next novel had been disposed of.

And a letter from his literary agents. He recognized the impressive notepaper used by Messrs. Wagstaffe and Plater.

> "Dear Mr. Wilmer,
>
> Messrs. Macalpine are anxious to receive the MS. of your autumn novel.
>
> We have pleasure in informing you that "Tempest" has reached a tenth large edition.
>
> The news from the U.S.A. is magnificent. "Tempest" is still the best seller. Etc. etc.——"

Wilmer threw the letter into the fire and watched it burn. The curling, reddening sheets seemed to writhe mockingly.

Yes, what a damned mockery it was!

A year ago he had been a poor man — so poor that he had been unable to give his wife that last great chance which might have saved her life. For fifteen years she had given him love, courage and understanding; she had been the human triumph behind the bitterness of his failure; she had worked and smiled in this shabby little Canonbury house, filling it with a spiritual tenderness. When he had gone down into the deeps, her love had picked him up, and with a comrade's courage had set him on his feet again.

"Go on, Peter. Some day it will come to you."

And it had come, but after her death, after he had ceased to care, and that was where the damned irony of it wounded him. "Tempest," a fragment of blood and of tears that had brought him

so much material plunder, had been written while death had come nearer and nearer. He had read it to her, chapter by chapter. He had finished it a month before she had died. And it had gone out to the world with her name upon the page of dedication.

"To Kitty."

And Kitty did not know.

Yet, how he had striven to convince himself that Catharine Wilmer did know, and that all that had happened to him since was as real to her as it was to him. Death and survival had not vexed him until he had found himself alone, and then he had struggled in the darkness outside the gate of the great mystery, trying to penetrate it, to feel Kitty's presence somewhere in the beyond.

He had failed, though there had been moments when he could have sworn that she was near him, sitting in that chair.

He could remember waking at night after she had died, and imagining her near him, quietly breathing.

"Kitty!"

And then, emptiness, and the realization of it, and the anguish of an inexorable silence.

II

SITTING before the fire, Wilmer told himself that there was no survival. Death was the end of things—a disaster that could not be retrieved.

A flutter of black ash recalled his agent's letter and its opening sentence:

> Messrs. Macalpine are anxious to receive the MS. of your autumn novel.

Wilmer got up and turned on the light. At the curtained window stood his desk, with papers of notes and a wad of unruled foolscap upon it, the pen laid neatly across the inkstand. During the daytime the window looked out on a little, black walled sooty garden in which grew a scraggy lilac, one or two hollies, and a few other shrubs. For ten years he had sat at that window, writing. He had

been a man of an impetuous untidiness, but now this table of his was meticulously neat, for it was a dead table where no live thought flowed.

Wilmer was unable to write. Since his wife's death his inspiration had deserted him.

For six months he had made a fight of it, sitting down grimly at that desk, and producing nothing but disjointed and unconvincing nonsense. In the end he had given it up. His agents were asking for the autumn book, and the book did not exist. Moreover, Wilmer did not care.

What did it matter? He glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece, stood a moment in an attitude of deep thought, and then went upstairs to his bedroom. At the top of the stairs he paused to call to the old servant.

"Mary."

A door opened.

"Did you call, sir?"

"I shall be out to dinner. Take the evening off. Go to the pictures."

"I would just as soon be at home, sir."

"No, go out," he said, with a touch of irritation; "it will do you good."

A few minutes later Wilmer was in the street, walking fast, but with no definite objective before him. His body was a mere automaton. He felt dissociated from it, this poor thing of the flesh that had to be fed and clothed and put to bed. His mood was one of strange detachment, for the ties that bound him to life had grown weak and frail, mere threads of gossamer waiting to be broken by some sudden impulse.

"Why should one live?"

He found himself in Upper Street — a shadow among shadows — under the haze of a February sky. It was cold, with a dry frostiness in the air, and the lights from the street lamps and the shop windows spread a soft blurred canopy between the houses. People passed him, and were passed by him; the roadway was clamorous and discordant, and yet he had a feeling that everything was unreal, and that he — the man who proposed to die — was the one and only reality. All these people were the mere shadows of his own

sense impressions. Already — they were dead and did not know it. Beyond the edge of desire lay the one reality, nothingness.

Wilmer was unconscious of the passing of time, but when he returned to the familiar street he seemed to recognize something dramatic in its dullness. He leaned against a brick gate-pillar and looked at his own house, that little black early Victorian box of bricks where so much and yet so little had happened. The house had a friendly and intimate look. Its eyes seemed to meet his with a stare of infinite understanding.

"Yes, come in out of the night," it said. "You and I will be together. You shall do just what you please, and I shall not utter a word."

Wilmer smiled. He crossed the road, walked up the paved path, took out his key and opened the door. A moment later he had closed it behind him, and found himself standing in the darkness of the passage hall. It was familiar, yet strange and silent; and yet — as he stood there — he felt that its silence was alive. A shiver of awe went down his spine. He listened. For a moment he held his breath.

He had a feeling that there was someone in the house, and so strong was this feeling that he challenged the house's silence.

"Mary — Mary — have you gone out?"

No one answered; but for fully a minute Wilmer stood straining his ears, his heart beating fast and hard. It was as though there — was — something there, something that lay just beyond the perceptive power of his senses — a presence intuitively felt. He was aware of a sense of strain and of tension, as though his self were striving to reach up and out beyond the limitations of his physical body. There was something to be touched, heard, seen, if only he could get beyond the ineffectual flesh.

"Kitty?"

A mysterious excitement seized him. He groped his way down the passage, arms extended, his eyes searching the darkness. A faint line of light showed under the sitting-room door. He found the handle, and pushing the door open, stood looking into the room.

Mary had made up the fire before going out and hung the fire-guard on the bars, and in the light of the little quiet flames Wilmer saw his wife's chair. It was empty. Of course it was empty. And

yet, as he closed the door and moved towards the centre of the room, he found himself questioning its emptiness.

"Supposing she is there?"

He felt an inward trembling.

"There — but invisible. After all one's senses shut one in. There may be something that can go beyond the senses."

He drew into the shadow of a corner where the bookcase stood.

"I could swear — that I felt ——"

And then his hands went out appealingly.

"Kitty, if you are there, give me some sign, if such a thing is possible."

The firelight flickered and there was silence; and swept away by some helpless impulse, Wilmer threw himself on his knees by the chair, and buried his face in the green cushion. He remained quite still, with a rigid stillness, but presently he raised his face, and it was the face of one who listened.

Moreover, it had an expression of wonder and of expectancy. He turned, and leaning against the chair, stared at the fire, for somewhere within himself a little, distant voice seemed to be speaking.

"Peter, the holiday we never had, the holiday we always talked of. Sunlight — and the blueness of sea and sky."

His face twitched; one hand gripped the green cushion.

"Somewhere in the south. I want to see palm trees, Peter, and the mimosa ——"

A spasm of emotion seized him.

"By God — I remember. Why shouldn't she be with me in the spirit? We'll go."

III

WILMER made all his arrangements through Messrs. Cook's office in Pall Mall.

When he entered the office about ten o'clock next morning he held the heavy swing-door open for a moment as though allowing a companion to pass through. He was smiling. At the long counter a clerk glanced at him inquiringly.

"Yes, sir?"

"I want to go to Algiers. Can you arrange everything?"

"You will want a sleeper, sir, and a cabin? There is rather a rush just now. And the hotel?"

"The best there is. It must have a garden, and not be in the middle of the town."

"The 'Mustapha' would suit you, sir; fairly quiet and beautifully situated."

"Can you wire for a room?"

"Certainly. Accommodation on the train and on the boat from Marseilles for one?"

"For two."

"A two-berthed cabin, and a sleeper for two. And the hotel? The 'Mustapha' has suites."

"I should want a suite facing south."

"Very good, sir. You have a passport?"

"No."

"We shall have to arrange that. I take it, sir, that you wish to leave——?"

"As soon as you can obtain the necessary tickets and accommodation."

"We will wire at once, sir. I will make a note of all the details."

Wilmer left by the boat train on a raw February morning. No one saw him off; in fact, no one but the old servant knew that he was going, and in his pocket he carried a letter from his literary agents—an anxious and worried letter. Wilmer had written to tell Messrs. Wagstaffe and Plater that his next novel would not be ready for autumn publication, and had hinted that its completion was a matter of indifference to him. His agents had diagnosed "swelled head."

He had the expectant look of a man setting out upon a memorable adventure. At Calais his calmness in the ridiculous scuffle at the "customs," might have suggested the experienced traveller. He had a detached air; he seemed to dream above the heads of the excited crowd.

"*Premier classe, monsieur?*"

"*Wagons-lits.*"

His porter delivered him into the hands of a little swarthy man in a chocolate-coloured uniform who conducted Wilmer to his sleeper.

"For two, monsieur."

"Yes."

Wilmer closed the door and arranged his baggage, and he behaved as though someone were sitting on the seat by the window.

"Not a bad crossing, Kitty. You would like the lower berth, dear. I shall be able to tuck you up before climbing upstairs."

Later, the attendant — a man of commerce — realized that Wilmer had no travelling companion.

"But monsier is alone?"

"No."

The man stared.

"There is a gentleman who has no berth. If monsieur is agreeable ——"

Wilmer was not agreeable. He showed a touch of fierceness. He had paid for his compartment and he did not wish to be disturbed, and the attendant, pocketing a fifty franc note, left him alone. The Englishman was either a rich egoist or a lunatic. The tip was the thing that mattered.

At Marseilles the sun shone, and Wilmer, the sole occupant of a two-berthed cabin, stood on the deck of the *Timgad* and watched the golden figure of Notre Dame de Mont Gard, grow dim against the blue of the northern sky. The sea was calm, and the deck-steward was portioning out deck-chairs. Wilmer asked him to reserve two.

"What name, monsieur?"

"Wilmer."

"*Monsieur et madame?*"

"If you please."

So the red chair next to Wilmer bore on its little white card "Madame Wilmer," as he sat and watched the sea.

A florid, sanguine, talkative old lady occupied the chair beyond the vacant one. She and Wilmer went in to meals and returned to their two chairs; and, in due course the sociable person attacked the dreamy man. She had a book in her lap — Wilmer's novel "Tempest."

"Beautiful crossing."

"Perfect."

"I am afraid your wife must be rather a bad sailor."

Wilmer started.

"Yes."

"What a pity. The cabins are so stuffy. I always believe in staying on deck."

Before Algiers flashed its whiteness across the blue, the sociable lady had discovered that she had made the acquaintance of a great novelist, and she showed that she was impressed, but she was a good deal puzzled by seeing Wilmer disembarking with no travel-weary wife leaning upon his arm. And she was still more puzzled when she found herself sitting opposite to him in the omnibus of the Mustapha Hotel.

The bus swept them out of Algiers up to Mustapha Superieur, while Wilmer sat and dreamed, and the sociable lady exercised a tactful reticence. It was obvious to her that Wilmer was an unusual man, and he behaved in an unusual manner, for when the omnibus deposited them in the hotel courtyard, Wilmer got out and wandered aside into the garden. He strolled along the terrace, with the late sunlight splashing upon the palms, olives and cypresses, and the flowers aglow in the green alleyways, and the red earthy spaces. He carried his hat in his hand. He was looking for a mimosa tree, and when he found one he stood and smiled at some imagined person who stood close beside him.

"Mimosa — Kitty. This is the sort of place we always dreamed of."

At the reception bureau a polite under-manager greeted him smilingly.

"Ah — Mr. Wilmer — we thought that you might have missed the boat. Yes — your suite is ready. Perhaps you would like to see it."

The under-manager led the way to the lift, and paused as though he expected a third person. His eyes met Wilmer's.

"Are you alone, sir?"

Wilmer replied with a slight movement of the head, and the under-manager bowed him into the lift.

"Pardon — but I understood —— The suite we reserved is for two."

"If I approve of it — you can charge me for two."

"It is a little unusual, sir."

"Does it matter? I like — space."

Wilmer approved of the suite. It consisted of a spacious bedroom, a bathroom, and a small sitting-room, and its windows looked out over the garden and into the fragrant yellow heart of a mimosa tree. Cap Matifou was visible, purple horn thrusting into the deep blue sea. Wilmer stood at one of the windows and his face dreamed. A porter came in with his light luggage, to be followed by a waiter who wished to know if monsieur desired tea.

Wilmer ordered tea, and he drank it at one of the open windows, watching the changing lights upon the garden below him. In the distance, the sea, softened to a blue-grey silkiness, reflected the glowing whiteness of a mass of cumulus cloud. Cap Matifou grew opalescent. He was aware of a sudden dewy freshness in the air, and of the perfumes rising from the garden where great patches of soft gloom began to spread under the trees.

"Good, isn't it, dear? Just what we dreamed of."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Gallaby, the lady of the *Timgad*, was chattering over her tea to a party of friends whom she had come to join.

"Who do you think came over in the boat with me? Yes; and he is staying here — Mr. Wilmer who wrote 'Tempest.' And, oh, my dear, there was something most odd."

"These literary people ——!"

"No; he looks quite ordinary. But he had two chairs on deck labelled 'Monsieur et Madame Wilmer.' His wife's chair was empty, and so — of course I thought — we had been chatting — you know — I thought she was a bad sailor or an invalid ——"

Mrs. Gallaby had a sense of the dramatic; she paused to refill her tea-cup.

"And wasn't she?"

"My dear, there wasn't a Mrs. Wilmer."

"Oh!"

"He got off the boat alone, and he came up in the bus with me — alone. Now — why ——?"

"Did you mention his wife?"

"I asked him if she was a bad sailor."

"Well?"

"And he said 'yes.' Wasn't it odd?"

When Wilmer walked into the dining-room he was quite un-

aware of the fact that a dozen people were watching him with interest. He stood in the middle of the big room, with that air of dreamy detachment, looking like a visionary. The head-waiter bustled up to him.

"A table for one, monsieur?"

"For two, please."

"Two? monsieur."

"Yes."

The man was polite but puzzled. He led the way to a corner.

"Madame is dining in her room, monsieur?"

Wilmer produced something from the side pocket of his dinner-jacket, and that something was transferred to the head-waiter's hand.

"I wish to have a table for two. Someone will be joining me here — very soon."

"Very good, monsieur. Shall we lay two covers?"

"Please."

The head-waiter pocketed two hundred-franc notes, and Mrs. Gallaby, who had been sufficiently near to hear the conversation touched her neighbour's sleeve.

"Did you hear? He asked for a table for two. Isn't it odd?"

As the days went by the Mustapha Hotel found itself becoming more and more interested in Wilmer's oddness. He spoke to no one, though his reserve was not studied and wilful; he ignored his fellow humans because he had ceased to be aware of them. He idled about, or sat in the sun, and on his face was a look of gentle expectancy. Unsubtle people thought him "sidy," and reduced his aloofness to a question of "pose." He spent much of his time in wandering about the hills, steeping himself and his growing obsession in the African spring, breathing the colour and the smell of it. Kitty had been a great lover of flowers, and all the flowers that he saw were hers.

He became a source of interest to the "staff." They liked him, for he was generous and courteous. The *femme de chambre* and the valet who looked after him thought him pleasantly and romantically mad. "Some great trouble!" For on his dressing-table he kept a silver mirror and a hair-brush, a tortoiseshell comb, a box of hairpins, scent bottles, women's things. A lace bed-cap hung on

the mirror frame, and a pair of grey suède shoes and of pink satin slippers waited under a chair.

"And he has a lady's night-dress in a silk case on the pillow beside him. Poor fellow!"

"How ridiculous!"

"Why should it be ridiculous. I always dust the shoes and the slippers, and clean the silver, and put it just as he placed it."

"And he tips well."

"You say he is an author?"

"He keeps a portfolio on the table. It is full of clean paper. I have seen him sitting there, but he never writes anything. Sometimes I open the portfolio and look."

"Touched in the head."

"I have no quarrel with such queerness. I wish some of the old ladies had a little of it."

There was one person in the hotel who had begun to observe Wilmer with the eyes of a clinician, and that person was the English doctor, a man with a quiet blue eye and an air of laconic kindness. Wilmer interested him. The doctor watched him for some days with a keen and sympathetic curiosity. He noticed that when Wilmer went to sit in a quiet corner of the terrace he always kept a vacant chair next to him, and that sometimes he spread a coat over the chair. The doctor followed him on one or two occasions up the hill to the Bois, and observed that Wilmer walked on the outside of the path, and that he kept turning his head to the right.

"Just as though — a woman — were walking beside him!"

On another occasion, Rome — the doctor — witnessed a curious incident. One of the hotel bores, a little, pursy, ape-headed profiteer with a face of brass, who was for ever talking about "my suite" — went up and laid a hand on Wilmer's other chair. Curmudgeon needed the chair, and chairs were free, and Wilmer had no right to it.

The doctor saw Wilmer betray a sudden, unexpected fierceness.

"This chair's reserved."

Curmudgeon appeared inclined to challenge the assertion.

"No one's sitting in it, my dear sir."

Wilmer jerked the chair from the other man's grip, and placed

it carefully on the far side of him.

"It is reserved. If you want a chair, find another."

The chair-stealer came away fuming and appealed in a thick voice to Dr. Rome.

"Did you see that? The fellow's cracked."

"Why?"

"Stuck to that chair. I thought he was going to get up and hit me. Just as though his best girl was coming to sit in it."

"Perhaps she is," said the doctor.

"He ought not to be allowed here. Everybody's talking about him."

"Well — they must talk about something. Besides, there is nothing offensive about the man."

"Nothing offensive? Why, my dear sir, if he isn't cracked, he is the most swollen-headed idiot that ever ——"

"Talked about a 'suite'," said the doctor who had moments of wanton puckishness.

But in Wilmer's dream-world the illusion was not all that it seemed. He had moments of bitter loneliness when the dream seemed nothing but an illusion, for what proof had he of that dear, invisible presence? There were times when he was most strangely sure that his wife was near him, and though his senses were too unsubtle to detect her immaterial presence, the soul of him felt some other being near him. The look of expectancy remained in his eyes, but it was more anxious and less radiant.

"O — words — words!" he would say to himself; "they are as useless and as limited as our senses. Something in me feels that which can neither be defined or explained. The blind worm is on the edge of vision."

Often, in the evening, he would walk up to the Bois and, standing there among the silent pines, look up at the star dust, and at the lights of Algiers below him. Like a visionary, alone in some very solitary place, he would try to penetrate the eternal mystery, to thrust himself through into a world of other dimensions. His dream was a beautiful conception, but the love in him cried out for some convincing sign.

Standing there he would speak to his dear, unseen comrade.

"Kitty — I am waiting. I want you. I feel you — there. Give me

some proof, dear, for sometimes my spirit is weak."

He would try and justify the silence.

"We are so much in the dark, dear. I can understand that it may be very difficult for you to get back to me in this world — as we know it. My senses limit me. These bondages of the flesh! Is it possible for you to unroll them — and to make me see or feel — or divine the imperishable 'you'? If you could touch me — but once ——"

His feeling of anxiety increased. Dream as he might, Wilmer knew that he could not prove to his eager, critical self that the obsession was anything but a dream. He might surround himself with his memories of her, with tender imaginings, pathetic make-believe, yet the illusion cast no shadow.

People noticed that he went about with a slight droop of the shoulders. His eyes looked anxious, and his face had lost its expression of happy expectancy. He avoided his fellow humans more and more; he ceased to appear in the dining-room and took his meals in his own suite.

Dr. Rome's interest grew more personal and grave. He began seriously to think of laying a gentle hand on this quiet madman's illusion. Something tragic might happen, for Wilmer's face suggested a possible tragedy.

IV

ONE day the Hotel Mustapha realized that Wilmer had disappeared.

Gossip put it about that he had gone to the desert. Someone had seen him driven off very early in a closed car; and Mrs. Gallaby, who lived on the same floor, questioned the *femme de chambre*.

"Yes, madame, Monsieur Wilmer has gone to Bou Saada. He will return in a few days."

Wilmer saw the sunset from the balcony of the little hotel at Bou Saada. Below him lay a garden with cherries and apricots in blossom and a yellow foliaged lemon tree full of pale fruit. Bou Saada spread itself in brown cubes among the palms and against a streak of yellow sand, with here and there a solitary tower or the dome of a mosque rising above the flat-roofed houses. The moun-

tains were camel coloured. Amid the palms and prickly pear a stream flickered. Somewhere, a blackbird scolded between bursts of deep piping.

Wilmer leaned his arms on the rail. He had come over the Atlas mountains and across the leagues of stony desert that lie beyond Aumale, and he had felt tired, but as he looked at the fruit blossom, the grey-green palms, the flickering water, and the outlined strangeness of the little eastern village, his tiredness seemed to pass. He heard the powerful voice of a muezzin calling the people to prayer. The desert flashed a momentary gold. He could catch the sound of running water, and a sense of peace descended on him.

"This — is what she wished to see. Can she see it? She — does — see it."

There were violets in the garden below, crimson stocks, and roses. It had been raining earlier in the day, and the air felt fresh. And Wilmer lingered there, watching the light die, and the palms growing black under the stars.

Someone knocked at his door.

"*Monsieur, le diner est servi.*"

He went down and dined, though he hardly noticed what he ate, or the people at the other tables, and afterwards he returned to the galleried balcony and watched the dim town, and the still dimmer mountains. A great silence held. A murmur of voices came from some of the other rooms, but he was not disturbed by them. A man and a girl came and stood under one of the other arches; he heard their laughter and their soft, happy chatter, and the human part of him was glad.

"Lovers," he thought, "like we were — and are."

And his right arm hollowed itself as though to enclose the invisible figure of his mate.

A spiritual calm descended upon him. He went to bed and slept without dreams, to be wakened just before the dawn by the muezzin's voice. It sent a tremor of awe through him, a quiver of expectation, and he slipped out of bed, and putting on his overcoat, stood on the balcony and watched the dawn.

Birds sang. The hills bathed their faces in the light, and the palms grew gently green under a cloudless sky. The strange town began to add its murmurs to the sound of running water; and

Wilmer's brain seemed to grow as clear and as cloudless as the sky, and a tremor of exultation and of wonder stirred in him. The dawn — the inevitable dawn — symbol of the eternal mystery!

From the very beginning of it that day seemed to him to be unlike all other days. He dressed, and with a strange sense of lightness at the heart he went out and, ignoring the casual crowd of guides and beggars at the hotel door, made his way down to the bed of the stream. He was alone here under the palms, but as he sat among the stones and listened to the running water he felt that he was not alone.

There he remained, with the shadows of the palms and the sunlight falling about him. The hours passed. Time had ceased to count, nor did he feel hunger or thirst, for his body was no more than the shadow of a tree, or the water upon which the sunlight played. He waited, his eyes expectant, his mouth tremulous with a kind of smiling tenderness.

> "One whole day thou shalt fast, and towards evening the spirit shall descend upon thee."

Where he had read these words Wilmer could not remember, but they seemed to come to him out of the clear desert sky.

About sunset he arose and stood leaning against a palm tree, his face to the west. His eyes were lit up.

"Kitty — I cannot go back, unless you go back with me."

And then, something came to him, a directing impulse, an inward urge, something that he found it impossible to describe.

He felt impelled towards the hotel. He returned to it, walking like a somnambulist, past the chattering Arabs and a staring waiter who said something to him that Wilmer did not hear. He went up to his room, closed the door and locked it, and stood still by the end of the bed.

"What do you want me to do, Kitty?"

He seemed to listen. Then he moved to the table by the window where he had left a note-book and pencil. He sat down, opened the note-book, picked up the pencil, and for a few seconds he remained motionless, rigid. Then the pencil began to move; it jerked, traced a few meaningless scrawls, and then, with a queer

aim of deliberate swiftness, it began to write.

Ten minutes later, just as the sun set, Wilmer was holding up the note-book and reading what he had written.

> "I am here — Peter — with you — always. Write, write for Kitty. Go back, help, mend life."

And the handwriting was not his own handwriting — but the handwriting of his wife.

v

WILMER's chauffeur, a grizzled Italian whose smile uncovered two rows of strong white teeth, had brought Wilmer over the Atlas mountains with irresponsible and brilliant recklessness, but before starting on the homeward journey from Bou Saada his English passenger cautioned him:

"Drive slowly, and be careful on the mountains."

The Italian beamed.

"Monsieur is a little afraid of the mountains?"

Wilmer's French was not of the best, but the Italian understood him to say that there was a second passenger in the car. The chauffeur comforted him with a beneficent flash of his white teeth, and on the mountain road he drove most sympathetically, to be rewarded in the courtyard of the Mustapha Hotel with a tip of a hundred francs.

The Italian took off his hat and bowed low. Later, he was heard to say that the Englishman was moonstruck but generous.

Yet, the Wilmer who had returned to the Mustapha Hotel was a different Wilmer. He walked into the dining-room that night, with a happy erectness; an inward light seemed to burn in him. He bowed to Mrs. Gallaby, and joked with the head-waiter.

After dinner he sat in the lounge and smoked, and when Dr. Rome came and sat beside him Wilmer broke into conversation. He laughed. He appeared light-hearted, but not in the least light-headed.

At nine o'clock he went up to his suite and rang for the *femme de chambre*. She found him standing by the writing-table, his portfolio open, with a photograph lying on the top of the white sheets.

"Madame — I shall have some work to do. Would it be possible for you to tidy my room at nine o'clock each morning?"

"Certainly, monsieur. Monsieur does not wish to be disturbed."

A month passed, and Wilmer had become part of the life of the hotel. He went about with a serenely radiant face; he attended concerts; he talked to the old ladies. On the terrace he still kept that empty chair beside him, and the hotel respected it. He went on botanizing expeditions with Dr. Rome.

And he was working five hours a day, and never before had he done such work, for the invisible presence was with him, filling his whole life.

One April day, a week before his return to England, Wilmer walked down through the garden to where Dr. Rome was sitting contemplating a bed of anemones. There was a vacant chair beside the doctor, and Wilmer took it.

"Rome, I want to ask you a question."

"Well — my dear man?"

"Don't you think me just a little mad?"

Rome, posed for the moment, found himself meeting the mystery of a smile.

"I must say — Wilmer, that I thought you a little strange."

"Life is strange, doctor. Has anyone explained it?"

"Not yet."

"My wife died — you know; but now she is with me again. Look here: I am going to send you my next book, and I want you to write and tell me whether you think it to be the book of a madman."

VI

IN THE early winter Dr. Rome read Wilmer's latest book. What the critics said about "Peace Haven," does not matter, for its success was not a mere material triumph, but a capture of the great heart of the world.

Dr. Rome wrote his letter:

> "MY DEAR WILMER,
>
> "I think this is the most sane and human thing that I have ever read ———"

So the years passed; and in a Surrey garden somewhere in the deeps of a green valley, Wilmer wrote and dreamed and grew flowers. He brought peace to many sufferers. And in the evenings, when he wandered in his garden he was not alone, for the garden was full of an invisible presence that was more real to him than the perfume of the flowers.

Two Men

THEY DISLIKED EACH OTHER FROM THE FIRST, MEETING LIKE TWO dogs who growl and pass each other with bristling hair.

For in the very nature of things they were antipathetic: Garland, fair and high-coloured and intense; Costello, yellow and faded and complacently corrupt. Costello was some ten years older than Garland; he had been in the East, and had come back with the East in his blood and in his skin. He drawled. He smoked innumerable cigarettes. To Garland he was somehow a thing of slime.

They met at the Tennis Club.

"Who's the babe in the bib?"

Costello had a scurrilous tongue; and Garland, overhearing that remark and hearing it addressed to the girl whom he wished to marry, went hot about the ears. For Garland was vexed by a youthful and impetuous awkwardness, a sensitive self-regard. He was wearing a tie, and he knew quite well that he should not have been wearing a tie, but a taffeta shirt with the collar flopping open. He had had to put on a tie and a collar because his conventional shirts were both in the wash. But, after all . . . !

He kept an eye on Costello. He had marked him down — for young Garland, unlike most of his generation was a good hater, a lad who in the old days would have whipped out a sword and made ugly thrusts. He was high-coloured, and thin, and long in the head, and his blue eyes would grow brittle like glass.

He asked someone about Costello.

"Who's that smeary chap?"

"That? Oh, new member. Here from India or China. Believe he's rather hot stuff."

Life, as though for the fun of it, chose to push young Garland and Costello on to a court to play singles. Costello's face and throat might be yellow, but his forearms had a kind of muddy greyness.

He looked as flabby as a slug, and yet he wasn't. When in play, a little satisfied smile seemed to trickle down his chin.

He took the first three games from young Garland as though he were taking candy from a child, and yet Garland rather fancied himself and was playing in the club team. He felt himself going hot about the ears. He whipped himself up; he put more sting into his drives; he rushed up to volley. But always, on the other side of the net, that other fellow with the greyish-yellow face returned his shots and beat him. Costello's strokes were made with a kind of easy languor. Without appearing to move he was always in the right place, and from the tip of a long nose, which gave him a curiously goat-like look, the little smile seemed to trickle.

Garland knew that they were being watched; Betty Lambert was watching them. Also he knew that he was losing his temper, while knowing that he was a fool to lose it. This sniggering, complacent fellow was putting shots out of his reach, and doing it easily, and enjoying the doing of it. He would lure Garland up to the net, and then pass him down the side lines with a kind of mocking neatness.

Garland had not won a game. It was his service, and he served a stinger.

"No."

Now Garland was quite sure that the serve had been a good one. His anger was sure of it. He paused, racket lowered, his fair head up.

"All right?"

"No — fault."

Garland glanced at the row of spectators on the green seats. His blue eyes were angry and accusing.

"No — fault, Ronny."

It was Betty's voice and it stung him.

"Oh, all right. Sorry."

But from that moment he played atrocious and tempestuous stuff, and knew that he was doing it and was making a nasty ass of himself, and somehow could not help it. And, at the end of the affair, Costello, strolling round with his languid shuffle and picking up his coat to extract a cigarette, asked Garland for a match.

"Got a match?"

Garland, wondering at himself, produced a box.

"Here. Off my game, rather."

Costello lit his cigarette.

"Your back-hand grip's all wrong. Besides — you hit too soon."

Garland repocketed his matches. Damn the fellow!

They met at the club during week-ends for the rest of the summer, and nearly every week-end they played singles together, not because they liked it, but because of their mutual hate. It was a perpetual attack and repulse. Garland was most furiously urged to beat Costello at the game, but never was he able to overcome the other man's sallow complacency or to remove that little trickle of a smile. It became a joke at the club.

"Hallo! there's Garland having another shot at Costello."

Invariably he was licked, though he spent a week of his summer holiday being coached by a pro. and another week of it playing at one of the south-coast tournaments. He came back in September and found Costello waiting for him; he played him and was beaten as usual.

For it was not that Garland was a poor sportsman and a bad loser. He was not. But in Costello he had come against his blood-enemy — his dog with an offensive smell. He hated him, and hated him without reason. He hated Costello's trousers, his nose, his sallow skin, his smeary little smile, the way he walked, the cigarettes he smoked, the very chair he sat on. His hatred made him take Costello with a kind of frantic seriousness, whereas the rest of the club took Costello rather casually. He was disliked. He had a nasty tongue and unpleasant ways.

He was both servile and insolent. He seemed to have picked up something from the East. He was a cadger. He cadged cigarettes and matches. He would forget to pay for his tea. He never had tennis balls of his own. And having, with an air of friendliness, borrowed something from somebody, he would go behind the lender's back and mock him.

On one of the last days, Garland, having received his usual licking, asked Costello a question in the middle of the tea-room.

"I say, Costello, have you ever bought a tennis ball?"

There was a laugh, but Costello had his answer ready.

"Oh, no need; I expect the rabbit to provide the balls."

Someone gave a tug to Garland's sleeve. It was Betty Lambert, for there was something in young Garland's eyes that frightened her, and she did not want a scene. Scenes are absurd. They do not happen.

"Ronny, I want the cakes."

He gazed at her with a kind of blind stare, and then suddenly sat down. He had felt like going for Costello's throat.

Another year came; but Costello had departed, leaving various unpaid bills behind him and an unpleasant memory among the local tradesmen. He had borrowed money from his landlady and had left her in the lurch. The Club itself had some trouble in recovering one of the "cups" that Costello had won and held for the year. An Agag of a fellow. And in due course Garland married his Betty, and rented a nice new house, and gave himself to gardening and domesticity. Garland was a bright lad, and a junior partner in the firm of Phips, Heath & Garland. He had character and keenness, and a flair for the particular business in which he was engaged, and since the firm prospered exceedingly, Garland prospered with it. He was a somebody on the morning train, and he travelled first, and wore spats, and was known as a warm young man with a future. He was making his two-thousand a year, and, being in the know, had opportunities for pretty little dabbles in financial ventures. He kept a car and a gardener, and two little Garlands, and had forgotten to vex himself needlessly over games. The Garlands were people. They dined and danced and bridged with the best people, but always young Garland maintained a strenuous attention to business. He was prosperous, happy and healthy.

Every morning he caught the eight-fifty-seven train to Waterloo, and took the tube from Waterloo to the City. He had a walk of three or four hundred yards, and his walking was rapid and purposeful. His keen, fresh profile was turned towards the day's adventure, for his successful career was very much an adventure. He loved it; he was absorbed in it. And then, one morning, he ran up against Costello. Almost they collided on a crowded piece of pavement in Threadneedle Street.

Their eyes met, and Costello's face looked greyer and less yellow, but it wore that little trickle of a smile.

"'Morning, Garland."

Something flared in Garland. He shouldered past Costello.

"Hallo! Still pot-hunting?"

And he passed on, but in the flash of Costello's reappearance he had realized something about the man, a shabbiness, a sickliness, a smeary, seedy surface. Costello's face was thinner; it had lost its sallow, larded complacency.

It did not occur to Garland that Costello might not have enough to eat, for that is the last thing to occur to a man whose blood is warm, and who has breakfasted well, and who proposes to breakfast well for the rest of his life. Garland had very definite views upon success and failure; and, like most practical men, he had a shrewd idea that most of the woe of the world is made for themselves by the woeful. But Costello had given him the impression of shabbiness, and he was glad of Costello's shabbiness — healthily and humanly glad about it. He walked on to the office of Messrs. Phips, Heath & Garland with an added zest for the day's work. That smeary old cad was fulfilling his destiny, and if he fell to hunting for fag-ends instead of for cups, so much the better for civilization.

But Garland did not foresee that the meeting with Costello would be repeated. It was. Their morning time-tables were so synchronized that they happened to pass each other in Threadneedle Street three mornings out of six. And Garland found himself expecting those meetings and looking forward to them. His enemy was his enemy still, a man whom he had never had the satisfaction of taking by the throat.

He would look Costello in the face with an air of amused and casual scorn.

"'Morning, Costello."

He addressed the man as he would have addressed a groom — and a bad groom at that.

"'Morning, Costello."

It was the flick of a whip, a nod and a patronizing word to the shabby dog, and Garland enjoyed it; for men do enjoy such things — whatever the moralists may have to say about it. Hatred is elemental. Your enemy is not worth while unless you can trample upon him.

As for Costello, he still wore that little smeary smile, but he wore it with a difference. It was surreptitious and a little forced, more ingratiating, less complacent. It had an edge of hunger and worry and haste. It sidled past people, and fawned on them, and was false and shameful and shameless. It was the smirk of the shabby cad and the cadger betrayed at last in the very failure of his cadging.

Garland told his wife.

"Funny thing—met that fellow Costello looking like a bookmaker's tout. Pretty down, I should gather."

He spoke of it with pleasure. Also, he was taking pleasure in observing the details of Costello's person. He observed them minutely and with an interest that was obvious to the man observed. Costello's face was a mass of little wrinkles; his lips were pale, his teeth yellow. His hair had grown thin, and Garland could postulate a bald patch under the grey felt hat. The hat itself suggested a greasiness; it needed a new band. The fellow's soft collar was frayed. The insides of his trousers where they rubbed against his boots would be thin and shiny. The sleeves of his coat were badly wrinkled.

Pleasurable realities. Obviously Costello was not hitting the business ball very cleanly. His game was not bringing him cups, and his cadging had been found out. The world would not lend him anything on the security of that smeary smile. Excellent! Garland felt good. It was right and proper that the world should call the bluff of such creatures as Costello.

Then, one morning, Costello hesitated, smiled his smile, and stopped.

"Garland."

"Hallo!"

"Still down at Malton?"

"I am."

"Tennis club still going?"

"Yes; don't go there often. Something better to do."

"Making money?"

"Oh, plenty!"

He talked down at Costello. He let his voice drop on him like coppers tossed to a street singer. He was easy, and casual, and

successful.

"Couldn't lend me a quid, could you?"

Costello's face was grey and eager. It had no smile. Its eyes were shifty and anxious.

Garland pulled out his pocket-book.

"I'll give you a quid, Costello; I don't lend money."

"I'll pay you back."

"I don't suppose so; it's a chuck-away."

He offered Costello the note, and Costello's fingers accepted it, and something in Garland exulted. Miserable sponger! He watched Costello slip the note into his pocket. So the fellow could squirm and accept.

"Thanks awfully, old chap."

Garland's blue eyes hardened.

"You needn't call me that; I'm not charitable."

And he walked on, feeling that he had left Costello in the gutter.

Again, on going home, he told his wife about Costello; and Betty, being the mother of two children, and more kind to the world, perhaps, because children are not always kind, looked gravely at her husband.

"I am glad you gave him the money. Poor devil!"

But Garland did not wish to be misunderstood.

"Oh, I didn't give it out of pity. One doesn't pity a thing like Costello. One kicks him."

"Ronny!"

"It's a fact. Some dogs seem to be born mangy. The thing is to make a chap like Costello realize that he is mangy. Ask any normal man and he'll tell you the same thing."

She looked shocked.

"Is it because he used to beat you at tennis?"

It was a thrust, but to her surprise her husband accepted the charge, and dealt with it as he would have dealt with a business problem.

"Partly—perhaps. But that's only what the highbrow people would call symbolism. Because there is something about a chap like Costello that makes the ordinary clean man see red. He belongs to that slimy sort of world that includes lounge-lizards, and hangers-on to pretty ladies, and young men who are deuced clever and superior

and sponge on their fathers, and back-stair poets."

Mrs. Garland opened her brown eyes more widely. She had known the babe and the passionate child in man, but even quiet and successful husbands could supply you with surprises.

"You men are very hard to each other!"

Her husband pointed the stem of his pipe at their garden.

"Have to be — sometimes. Life means that, and you and the kids. Peace here, Betty, and war in the city. But there are rules to a game even when it is a bit rough, and Costello is one of the fellows who plays to no rule. That's why we out him — push him off the field."

"Deliberately?"

"Certainly. Yellow men and red men are no use to us."

In Threadneedle Street Garland continued to meet Costello, and Costello appeared to grow greyer and shabbier. He had made no attempt to return Garland's pound note, and Garland would have been disappointed had Costello returned it. He had painted his portrait of Costello, and the fellow had to be like his portrait, sinister and shameful and futile. He noticed that Costello glanced at him with a kind of furtive insolence. His smile remained, but it had assumed the suggestion of a snarl.

"'Morning Costello."

Garland still gave him the casual, patronizing flick of the voice. Costello's snarl pleased him. It was more significant than mere servility, for it betrayed the fact that Costello could be rubbed on the raw, and that like a cur he showed his teeth, but dared not bite. Yes, life was flaying Costello and rubbing in the salt, and Costello winced and snarled, and got shabbier and shabbier.

Came a raw morning in November when Costello faltered and stopped. He had a grizzled, grey, starved look. His nose was blue. His voice seemed to come stiffly as though half frozen.

"Excuse me, Garland."

"Well?"

"I'm rather put to it this week. You couldn't let me have a fiver, could you?"

Carefully and deliberately Garland took silver from his trousers' pocket, selected two half-crowns, and offered them to Costello. Neither man spoke. They looked into each other's eyes for a mo-

ment with scorn and hatred. Mutely they said to each other terrible things.

Then Costello's claw of a hand came out and took the five shillings. It made Garland think of the pecking beak of a hungry, cold-eyed bird.

They glared and went their ways, and Garland knew that he had planted the steel of his scorn deep in the other man's body. He saw Costello as a body, not as a soul. Such a fellow had no soul. And Garland went on to his day's work and enjoyed it, and lunched well at his city club, and entered his first-class compartment on the five-thirty-four train, and felt warm. He lit a pipe. It was a raw evening, and the London night was blue and blurred, and the lights looked huge. Garland watched them, and the glare of an occasional street, and the dreary and dead faces of the strange houses. Dim back-yards, and little squalid gardens, and chimney-pots, and slimy roofs. Probably Costello slunk home to some such kennel; and Garland was glad. All the bad things were good things when they happened to Costello.

Three days passed. It snowed; and then a raw, drizzling thaw set in, and people hurried in the streets. Breath steamed. Garland was strong and healthy, but even he enjoyed rubbing his hands in front of the office fire. His room was comfortable: it had a Turkey carpet and well-padded chairs; and a thick Harris-tweed overcoat hung behind the screen. He remembered that on the last occasion when he had seen Costello the fellow had had no overcoat.

Splendid: let the beast freeze!

Yes, he had not run up against Costello during the last few days. Probably Costello was feeling a bit pinched, and wished himself back in India. Garland sat down to read his morning's letters.

A clerk opened the door.

"Someone wanting to see you, sir."

"Who?"

"A man. He wouldn't give his name. Looks rather a seedy customer."

"What's his business? . . . Shut that door, Spicer — there's a deuce of a draught."

"He said he would tell you his business, sir."

"You can tell him I don't see strangers who refuse their names

and won't state their business."

The clerk vanished, to reappear half-a-minute later. He closed the door.

"The fellow looks funny, sir."

"Funny! What d'you mean?"

"Well, he looks almost as though he had been fished out of the water, frozen stiff. He wouldn't give me his name."

"Did you tell him——?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, tell him again. It's perfectly absurd!"

The door closed on the clerk, and Garland heard voices. He could not help hearing them, for one of the voices was like a hoarse and rusty hinge, and both voices were raised. The hoarse voice was saying: "I don't care a damn! I'm going to stay here till Garland comes out. You had better tell him to come out. My name's Costello."

Garland's hands gripped the arms of his desk chair. He got up and went quickly to the door and opened it. The clerk was holding open the glass door leading into the vestibule, and in the open doorway stood Costello, with the grey steps and the grey street behind him. Almost he stood there like a man who was intoxicated and making a great effort to keep his balance. His feet were wide apart; he swayed.

Garland was angry. What the devil did the fellow mean by coming to his office and making a scene? He advanced upon Costello.

"Look here—clear out!"

A little, thin smile trickled down Costello's face, but his eyes were smileless; they stared.

"I always licked you at tennis!"

Then something happened to him. He seemed both to crumple at the knees and to stagger backwards. He went down the steps like a man forcibly ejected, and lay there with his legs pointing up the steps and his head on the pavement. His deplorable felt hat had fallen off; he looked skull-headed and bald.

A man who was passing and the clerk hurried and bent over him. They got him by the shoulders.

"He's fainted."

Garland stood at the top of the steps.

"Better carry him in. Bring him into my office."

So Costello was carried into Garland's office, and they laid him on the hearth-rug before the fire and put a cushion under his head. The clerk, happening to touch one of his hands, found it as cold as stone.

"He looks pretty bad, sir."

"Undo his collar."

The clerk was kneeling beside Costello, and the other two were bending over him. The clerk unbuttoned Costello's waistcoat and unfastened his tie and collar, and the thin shirt, lacking buttons, came open and disclosed Costello's chest. He was wearing nothing but that thin shirt, and the ribs stood out under the yellow skin.

The clerk looked scared.

"Good lord! — no wonder his hands felt cold! Regular skeleton!"

Garland had gone to his desk and had picked up the telephone. He spoke to the exchange.

"Put me on to the nearest doctor, please. Someone very ill here. You probably know a doctor and his number. . . . You do? Thanks very much. It's urgent!"

Holding the receiver, he looked at the group before the fire. The clerk had risen and was standing staring at Costello, and over Costello's grey and shrunken face, with its beak of a nose and bony forehead, the firelight flickered.

"He's not breathing, sir."

"Oh?"

"I believe he's dead!"

When the doctor arrived, his problem was of the simplest. He looked at the grey face and the ashy lips. There was no need to listen for heart-beats. The stark stillness of the figure was sufficient.

"The man's dead. . . . Starvation and cold — by the look of him."

Garland travelled home by the usual train. He walked from the station and entered the house rather silently, nor did he rush upstairs to the nursery. His wife found him sitting and smoking before the drawing-room fire, with the lights switched off. She was a woman who noticed things, and especially things about her husband. She switched on the light over the sofa and sat down, and

became busy with some piece of mending; but though she did not remark upon it, she was conscious of her husband's silence.

"The Cuthberts have asked us to dine to-morrow. Shall we go?"

"Not very keen."

She gave him a mother look.

"Not feeling seedy, old thing?"

"No. . . . Just thinking, that's all."

She allowed the silence to resettle itself. If her husband was preoccupied, it was probably a matter of business.

But suddenly, holding his pipe by the bowl, he spoke as though addressing the fire:

"One shouldn't scorn some things — no, not in a particular sort of way."

She was surprised. She let her hands rest in her lap.

"What . . . are . . . you talking about, Ronny?"

"Worries?"

"Oh, nothing. Just meditating. Had rather hectic day."

"Worries?"

"Oh, much as usual. Nothing to worry about — really. But sometimes one sits and thinks."

The Pool of the Satyr

I

THE ENGLISHMAN HEARD THE SOUND OF PIPING IN THE GREEN gloom of the chestnut woods, a piping such as Pan might make after drinking Falernian wine on a very hot May morning.

The Englishman was piqued, and a little puzzled. He had been lying at the foot of a tree, making a meal of bread and olives, and reading Ariosto between the mouthfuls — a lean, brown Milton of a man, dressed in rusty black, and with a knapsack over his shoulders. He wore his own fair hair, and had the chin and mouth of a Jesuit.

"Pan in Arcady! And Pan is merry!"

He turned on one elbow and had a glimpse of a very tall old man tripping it down a woodland aisle, and playing sedulously and foolishly upon a flute. Now and again he would skip like a young ram, or take a few staid and solemn steps like a dancer dancing a minuet. He had a long nose, black eyebrows, white hair, a pair of mad and wandering eyes, a little tufted beard, and a black mole on one cheek.

The old man footed it under the trees, piping jerkily on that flute of his, till he set eyes on the Englishman lying at the foot of the tree. He drew up sharply, stared, and wiped his flute on the tail of his coat.

"Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, sir," said the Englishman.

"You will observe that spring is here, sir. Bacchus drinks wine in the heat of the morning. And Pan, the great god sleeps in the shade. My name is Cæsare, sir; Cæsare Lombardi."

He bowed, and the Englishman got up and returned the bow.

"My name is Trevanion, Nigel Trevanion," said he, speaking

good Tuscan Italian.

"And you eat bread and olives?"

"And read Ariosto."

The old gentleman grimaced.

"Ariosto! One of the Jew creatures. Nothing happened after Augustus and Ptolemy. Diocletian, sir! Diocletian was a fool. And have you tarried long in these parts?"

"Three days."

"Perhaps you are a Patagonian, sir?"

"No; merely an Englishman."

"Ah, indeed, the oyster island. And are your people still painted blue?"

"No, we wear red coats and powder our heads white."

"Red and white," and he blew a shrill note on his flute. "Venus and Adonis. Dear me! But we must not talk too loud, sir, for Pan and the Satyrs are sleeping."

He was mad, quite mad; but this Englishman understood some sorts of madness, being something of a vagabond and a visionary, half-soldier, half-poet, not a mere Beefeater in a black bonnet and a red tabard. The old man was a courtier, despite his madness. His linen was clean, and he had the head of an aristocrat.

"These are very fine woods, sir. I started out this morning from Monte Verde to find a certain famous spot called the Pool of the Satyr; but, as you see, I have not found it."

"Very droll, very droll indeed. Let me see, what o'clock is it? About an hour after noon. I can show you the pool, sir, because the Pool of the Satyr belongs to me."

"There is some tale, is there not, about this pool?"

Cæsare tucked his flute under one arm and took Trevanian by the elbow.

This way, my friend. Perhaps you are a scholar; perhaps you have read even the effeminate and luxurious Ovid?"

"I have. But about this pool?"

The old man sniggered.

"Did you ever see Pan bathing by moonlight? No, young man, for you have not lived long enough. Thirty years in Arcady before the true vision comes! But I shall see the great god bathing there before I die, and I shall hear the satyrs squealing and making love

in the woods."

"Certainly you are quite mad," thought Trevanion; "but no doubt it is a harmless sort of madness."

They went on through the sun-splashed gloom of the chestnut woods, the old gentleman chattering, and sometimes blowing on his flute.

The ground fell away suddenly, the woods opened, and a little valley caught and filled itself with sunlight. A grove of stately chestnuts carried the woodland shade into the yellow lap of the valley. The drooping boughs of the outer trees reached nearly to the ground and shut out the view like heavy green curtains.

Cæsare drew up with a sort of goat's leap, and stood pointing with his flute.

"Belphœbe bathes! O daughter of Helen! And Pan is asleep! Yonder you see my daughter, sir."

Trevanion stood amazed. Below him, and not a hundred paces away, lay a blue pool set in a hollow of grey rocks and rich green grass. Beyond it, and skirting it on the north, ran a stone wall all yellow in the sunlight, and behind the wall were piled masses of green foliage, great ilexes and stone pines, with tall cypresses intermingled, like spires in a city. A yellow villa showed among the trees on the hillside.

Trevanion saw all this, and more. It was a wonder world of blue, green and yellow, with one white figure burning like a little flame in the midst of it. A young girl had just stepped up out of the pool, and was standing on a flat rock, drying herself in the sunlight. A great mass of red-gold hair tossed and flowed about her naked shoulders and bosom as she moved, and when she stooped it poured down like liquid metal and touched the grey rock on which she stood. That wonderful hair of hers and her white body showed up against the blue of the still water like a cameo of ivory and amber set in lapis lazuli.

"A naiad, sir, a beautiful creature, or the Spirit of the Pool, if it pleases you. We are before time was, in this valley, before the Jews brought their slaves' hymns into the land. Some day the great god Pan——"

Trevanion's blue eyes had a strangely serious look.

"It is your daughter, signor?"

"My daughter, sir? What is my daughter? Why nothing but a pagan child, sir, a naiad, a Bacchic girl, a beautiful slip of nature, such a girl as Leda was."

The Englishman studied him narrowly. The old gentleman was mad, his brain full of mythological nonsense, and yet there was a queer ferocity about him, a jubilant and savage paganism that suggested the tusks of a boar. The beauty of the scene was incontestable, the bathing girl a picture of Artemis, and yet this old man breathed the spirit of a wise and cynical faun.

Before Trevanion could stop him he had skipped out into the sunlight and was piping away on that flute of his. The girl had drawn up her white underwear, and was fastening the laces, while a gown of flowered blue lay at her feet. She raised her head and looked toward the chestnut trees, and Trevanion, hesitating, troubled, held back.

"Phœnician Tin Man, come hither."

Cæsare had pirouetted round, and was beckoning with his flute.

"Come hither, brother scholar. You shall see your own face in the pool."

Trevanion obeyed one of those impulses that are more potent than all the meditations of a philosopher. He walked out from under the shade of the trees, and accompanied Master Cæsare down to the pool. The girl was fastening the laces of her dress, her little bare feet showing, and her wet hair all glossy in the sunlight. She smiled at Cæsare, and turned the clearest of clear eyes on the Englishman.

"The water was not so cold to-day. Maria is cross, father; you went without dinner."

Cæsare kissed her.

"What are broken meats to a scholar? And here, my child, is a strange fellow, an Englishman, who set out to find the Satyr's pool, and ended by setting his teeth on edge by eating olives."

The girl looked straight at Trevanion and smiled at him. She was utterly unembarrassed, more clean and natural than any child that he had ever met, and so lovely that his heart felt strangely moved. Her youth was just at its blossoming, smooth, dewy, glowing with the bloom of ripening fruit. La Bionda they called her, and La Bionda she was, with her red-gold hair, and her warm skin

slightly tanned by the sun. Her vivid blue eyes were like the water in the pool; her little red mouth and sensitive nose made Trevanion think of an exquisite child.

"So you have come to see the Pool of the Satyr? And it is very beautiful, is it not?"

Her hands were still busy with her dress, and Trevanion noticed that it was such a dress as her mother might have worn, quaint, flowing, yet quite simple, the dress of fifty years ago.

"It is all very beautiful," he said, glancing across the pool and up at the ilexes and stone pines.

The girl shook her hair, and slipped her feet into a pair of old red leather shoes.

"So you are an Englishman," she said. "England is an island, is it not?"

"Yes, far away in the north."

For the moment he found himself wondering whether the old man's madness had lighted on her, or whether she was merely a strangely innocent and untaught child.

"And what is your name?"

"Nigel Trevanion."

She repeated the words after him with great seriousness.

"Now I shall never forget it. My name is Rosamunda; it was my mother's name. I do not remember my mother."

"You live here?"

She pointed to the yellow villa.

"Yes."

"Always?"

"Always. Where else would one live?" It is very beautiful, and father is happy here."

"And you have never travelled, signorina?"

"No."

"Not even to Monte Verde?"

"Never."

He was amazed. What sort of wild woodland girl was this, this exquisite creature who had never wandered even so far as Monte Verde, who had heard of England as some sort of vague island in the northern seas, who wore the simple dresses of fifty

years ago, and to whom this sunny, lonely life seemed most natural and good.

"I have travelled much," he told her, as she led the way to the wooden gate in the yellow wall.

"Ah, is that so?"

She was as alive and as inquisitive as a bird.

"America, France, Spain, Austria, Greece, Italy."

"You speak almost like an Italian. And which country do you love best?"

His manhood answered the spell of her *naïveté*.

"Which? England is green and soft, but it rains too much. Italy, well, Italy is the country of the gods."

"The gods? Why, to be sure: Jove and Juno, Venus and Apollo, and Pan, whom father says is the greatest of all. I have not chosen a god or a goddess."

He was still more amazed.

"But surely there is another god," he said. "Our Father, and Christ, and the Holy Virgin. At Monte Verde you will see the churches—the churches of God and the saints."

She looked round at him with frank eyes.

"Yes, Maria prays to the Holy Virgin, but father laughs at these new gods and goddesses, and I have never read of them in any of his books."

"I understand," he said. "Signor Cæsare is a classic. But you have never seen a priest?"

"A priest? Oh—yes. Father Tolomeo comes to see Maria; but father says he is very ignorant, and I do not like Father Tolomeo; he has eyes like an ox, and his beard is always dirty."

Trevanion laughed softly, for the charm and the mystery of it all were working in his blood. Rosamunda went up the steps like a gazelle.

He was hard and sinewy, a man who had led a clean, marching life; but he lost distance to her red shoes and cloud of sunny hair. The whole place was mad, and the madness was infecting him.

Trevanion touched her hand. His chest was heaving, his nostrils dilated.

"You are Atalanta."

"Atalanta of the Apples! But she was cruel, was she not? I am

never cruel."

"And you speak the truth," he said, looking into her innocent eyes, and marvelling at her and at himself, for that grey stairway seemed the stairway to Paradise, and that wonderful hair of hers like folded golden wings.

"Come."

She took his hand like a child, and led him up more steps to the terrace. The Englishman could see that it was a wilderness of a place where the very weeds were flowers, and vines and roses grew as they pleased. The plaster was peeling off the walls of the villa, and the green shutters looked as though they had not been painted for fifty years.

"What is the name of your home?"

"The Villa Lunetta."

"The House of the Little Moon!" and he added under his breath, "The House of Midsummer Madness."

The rest of that Italian day had all the strangeness of a dream. The villa was full of old furniture, armour, pictures, antiques. The tapestry on the wall of the salon told the tale of the rape of Lucrece, and there were frescoes in the pillared hall showing Circe and her enchanted beasts. A head of Julius Cæsar looked at Trevanion from beside a *cinque-cento* cabinet in ebony and mother-of-pearl. The curtains were of Venetian velvet, very faded and old.

Rosamunda sat there in a gilded chair, sipping red wine out of a Venetian beaker, while Cæsare and the Englishman talked. The scholar was less of a madman when he spoke of books, and their words were of Anacreon and Plato, Euripides and the Man of Mantua. They even argued about the makers of Glossaries, and the wise men of the Renaissance; yet Trevanion had drunk of that other madness and the red wine that was in Rosamunda's heart.

It was four o'clock when the Englishman remembered that the gates of Monte Verde were shut at sundown. He had to break away from a panegyric on Homer, pick up his knapsack, and leave Cæsare to his flute. Rosamunda went with him to the terrace, and the westering sunlight was in her eyes.

"You will come again?" she said, with the simplicity of a child.

And Trevanion's heart and lips answered her.

"I will come again, O Princess of the Pool."

II

WHEN Trevanion found himself on the edge of the chestnut woods he turned and looked back at the blue pool and the yellow villa, as though to assure himself that they were still there.

"The House of the Little Moon," he said to himself, "The House of Midsummer Madness. And an old gentleman who looks for Pan! And the girl!"

Trevanion had not gone a furlong, when he hesitated, looked about him, and stood still. For a moment he could not tell why he had stopped and why he was standing there. It was as though he had lost something and could not remember what. Yes! He had lost the sound of falling water. There was nothing but silence, and more than silence, a sense of things hidden, a feeling of being watched, of being followed by invisible creatures. He listened, and heard nothing; looked about him and saw only the great trunks of the trees and the path that was spattered with little beams of golden light.

"Idiot!"

He walked on again, but the poet and the mystic in him were holding a debate.

"The spirit of the woods — nothing more. Yes, my friend — but can you deny this strangeness and this mystery? If Pan came skipping down the path? Tut! you are as mad as the old gentleman! Perhaps there is reason in the mythologist's madness? The truth is you have been drinking red wine, and you are very nearly falling in love. Rosamunda, Rosamunda!"

Presently the path struck the rough track that threaded the wooded country between Monte Verde and Castella Nero. A horse and a mule were coming up the hill, and Trevanion heard the thudding of their hoofs before they swung into view round the edge of a thicket of pines. The horse was black, and the mule white. On the black horse sat a man in a red coat faced with silver. A priest in a brown frock rode the mule.

Trevanion edged aside as though to take cover, thought better of it, and walked on. The man on the black horse was Count Otto von Mirenbach, the Man with the Red Mouth.

These two — the Austrian and the priest — stared hard at Tre-

vanion, and then glanced questioningly at each other.

"The English fool from Monte Verde!"

"What does he do here?"

"Make poetry and tramp everywhere on olives and black bread. These English are quite harmless."

Otto von Mirenbach was a big man, very handsome in a black and arrogant way, save for that mouth of his that looked like a red gash in his broad face. He was the Austrian tyrant in these parts, and had his home at Castella Nero.

His companion, the priest on the white mule, was a certain Fra Bartolomeo, who had a chapel to serve on the road to Castella Nero. He was a bouncing, black-eyed, juicy rogue, a pimp as to his religion, and fond of a succulent tale.

The Englishman met these two worldlings in a narrow part of the track. He stared hard at von Mirenbach, and made as if to pass on, but the Austrian reined in and put his horse across the path. He was accustomed to men who grovelled before him, and he did not love the English.

"One moment, my friend; not in such a hurry."

Trevanion stood looking up at him and saying nothing. He did not even pull off his hat.

"You will observe, Fra Tolomeo, what pleasant manners the man has. I believe you are an Englishman, Mr. Black Coat, and that your name is Trevanion. They tell me you speak Italian like a Florentine."

Trevanion still looked at him steadily.

"My name is what you say it is, and I am an Englishman. How does it concern you?"

Von Mirenbach showed that smile of his.

"Everything concerns me, dear sir. I am the little god in these parts, and if I choose to ask people questions, they answer me. It is my business to know everything that goes on. And if I do not approve of certain people, I have them arrested and deposited on the other side of the frontier."

Now Trevanion was no fool, and he had the sense to keep his temper.

Von Mirenbach was not boasting, and the Englishman knew it.

"You have the advantage of me," he said, parrying the Austrian's

insolence by pretending to be ignorant, "but I do not know to whom I am speaking."

"I happen to be Otto von Mirenbach, the Governor of Castella Nero."

Trevanion bowed to him with great gravity.

"My ignorance is chastened, sir. In England I may boast myself something of a gentleman. In Italy I am just a traveller and a scholar; I go where I please, with my knapsack on my back."

Von Mirenbach nodded.

"One has to be so careful in these days, Mr. Trevanion, and my *sbirri* have a habit of being hasty and rather rough. I have no wish to see harmless people in trouble. You have papers, credentials?"

Trevanion slipped his hand under his coat.

"If you choose to see them, sir, I have letters to the Embassies at Rome, Florence, Naples; also my banker's letter of credit."

The Austrian made a deprecating gesture.

"No, no; it is quite unnecessary. I must apologize for stopping you, but it is a habit of mine. I have my responsibilities, Mr. Trevanion. And may I remind you that I have a very passable library at Castella Nero. The books are at your service."

Trevanion bowed again as von Mirenbach prepared to ride on.

"Your courtesy is appreciated, sir."

"The English are always welcome, Mr. Trevanion."

And they parted, disliking each other wholeheartedly, neither of them deceived by the other's dissembling.

It did not occur to the Englishman that these two worthies were bent upon adventure, and that their faces were set toward the Pool of the Satyr. Fra Tolomeo had drawn his white mule close to the Austrian's black horse.

"A nymph, sir, a veritable Aphrodite! Pomegranates and milk and peaches! And innocent as a bit of snow from the mountains!"

"And the father is mad, eh?"

"Mad as Nebuchadnezzar. A great scholar in his day, sir; but now he runs about looking for Pan and Bacchus."

"The old dog!"

"You mistake me, sir. He is a most eminent, erudite, and childish madman. He is so simple, dear count."

The priest dropped his voice, and the two heads drew close to-

gether. It was Fra Tolomeo who talked, von Mirenbach who guffawed and exclaimed. That red mouth of his seemed to grow bigger, but his brown eyes looked hard as glass.

"You rogue! You mean to tell me you have seen — this performance?"

"Sir, it was thrust upon me. A man cannot help having eyes."

"But you have a sleeve, you scoundrel. I would have you remember that I am a very sensitive gentleman. No smiles, mind you, but gravity, seriousness."

Fra Tolomeo grimaced.

"I will be more solemn than a bishop, sir, a dignified and fatherly creature."

"You rogue!"

So these two worthies rode down through the chestnut woods to the Satyr's Pool, and found nothing but sunlight and silence there and calm blue water. They dismounted, and tethered the black horse and the white mule to a couple of old arbutus trees, and climbed the steps to the villa.

"The old fellow keeps good wine, sir."

"You have tasted it, have you?"

"Once or twice, dear count. I see no one about. Their woman, Maria, knows me."

It was Maria, a swarthy peasant of five-and-thirty, with a Roman shawl over her bosom, who met them in the loggia. She stared at Fra Tolomeo with her dull black eyes, and waited.

"Maria, the count has come to visit your master. Is the signor at home?"

"Signor Cæsare is in his library, Father. Will you come in?" And she made von Mirenbach a curtsy. "The signorina shall be told of your presence."

Fra Tolomeo winked at his patron.

"A good girl," he said softly, "and very religious."

Rosamunda, caught sleeping on a couch in the salon with her head on a cushion covered with old Venetian velvet, sat up and stared at these portentous visitors. Maria had crowded them in with a cry of "Count Otto von Mirenbach, signorina."

Now this child had met very few men in her lifetime, and she had never set eyes on anything as stately as the Austrian.

Fra Tolomeo attempted to heal the silence.

"Pardon this intrusion, signorina, but Count Otto has heard so much of your father's scholarship, that, being no mean scholar himself, he must needs ride over to make his acquaintance."

Tolomeo was very impressive and paternal, but the girl threw a mere casual glance at his perspiring face.

"My father will be here."

Von Mirenbach was bowing to her, and making ready to kiss her hand.

"Signorina, this intrusion is our sin, and yet our reward. You will forgive me for waking you from so charming a siesta."

He advanced two steps, stooping slightly, his cocked hat under his left arm, his whole pose a courtly caress. And all the while her blue eyes were looking him straight in the face, the eyes of a child that read him without fear or favour.

"Permit me."

He advanced another step, but she was up and away like a bird, and standing by one of the open windows, her eyes still holding his.

"I do not like you," she said quite simply. "I do not like you at all."

Next moment she was gone, and the window showed nothing but the tops of green trees and the blue sky. Those red shoes of hers were flitting along the terrace.

Otto von Mirenbach was left standing there, like a man who has been fooled by a shadow, rather foolish and very angry.

"Damn the minx!"

His red mouth was ugly. He heard Fra Tolomeo chuckle.

"You see how simple and wild she is, sir. A thing of the woods and waters."

The Austrian was moistening his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Something to be caught and tamed," he said reflectively. "Something fit for Pan to handle. There is reason in all this mythology, my friend. Now, let us see this mad father of hers, and talk antique moon rubbish."

A door opened jerkily, and Cæsare was with them, sage, big-eyed, and eccentric. He was the grandee, the scholar, the gentleman, less moonstruck in these moments, and just as quick with his courtliness as was this big animal of an Austrian.

"Welcome, gentlemen. It is hot in the sun to-day, and the wine will come cool from the cellar."

Otto von Mirenbach bowed to him with great deference.

"I have the honour to salute that most eminent, classic and scholar, Maestro Cæsare. Though I come from the north, sir, I make my reverence to the man of the Augustan age."

Cæsare bowed to him in turn.

"If my villa, sir, holds a few books and some noble learning, it is at the service of all noble scholars and poets."

"A sweet spot, Maestro, a most sweet spot, a veritable Arcady."

For five minutes they stood and made solemn and ambassadorial speeches to each other, while Fra Tolomeo grinned in the background, mopped his head, and wondered when the wine was coming. Von Mirenbach was a very great courtier, and a supreme harlequin when he pleased. His scholarliness was not mere tinsel. He could air a fine Latinity, and quote you obscure poets and philosophers with an aptness that filled old Cæsare with delight.

"Will you be seated, Count? The presence of so cultured and erudite a gentleman is an honour to my house. Touching the writings of Plato, I may say——"

They kept it up for an hour or more, and if Otto von Mirenbach had failed with the daughter, he had nothing to complain of in his conquest of the old man.

"My books at Castella Nero, Maestro, wait for your fingers. I need a scholar to handle them. It may be that you will grant me the honour."

Cæsare waved his hands.

"Your excellency is too kind. Some day it shall be my privilege and pleasure. At present I am very busy, sir, very occupied against the coming of the full moon. The great mysteries are ripe, Count Otto."

He began to babble about Pan and his woodland crew, and all that wonderful old life that was invisible because of blindness and artificiality of the age. And von Mirenbach listened, solemn as a doge of Venice, and vastly interested, because of other motives and other passions. The old madman was painting a wild, sensuous picture.

"The books can wait, dear Maestro," he said as he rose to go. "I

would not meddle with these learned mysteries."

"You will be welcome always, and at all hours, sir."

"You will find no scoffer in me. Perhaps you will make me a disciple."

He went down the steps to the pool, smiling, licking his lips, with Fra Tolomeo at his heels.

At Monte Verde, Trevanion the Englishman lodged at the house of Luigi the bookseller. He was a little hunchback, with a wild mane of grey-black hair, fierce eyes, and the face of a broken god. He had little to say, but his words, when they did fall, were like bits of glowing wood dropping out of a fire. He lived alone, hated all women, and would not let anything in petticoats enter in his shop.

His enemies said: "He has the evil eye."

People who knew and who honoured him would tell you: "His wife ran away with a German."

Trevanion had bought books from this old man, talked to him, and then gone to lodge at his house—for Luigi was more than a bookseller. He was a philosopher and a scholar.

They were sitting out under the vines that night when Trevanion asked him a question.

"Have you ever ridden to Castella Nero?"

"Twice since last autumn."

"Is there a library there?"

Luigi scowled.

"Yes, the library of Otto von Mirenbach. Why do you ask?"

"Because I met the Austrian to-day."

"Looking like his books, eh, all bound in red, and gorgeous as sin. I know the beast."

"He offered me the use of his library, Luigi."

The Italian's venom was not assumed.

"Beware of von Mirenbach," he said, "he is clever and cruel; a man who loves mischief. And yet, I say it, I had the honour of fooling him. I spoilt two "Aldines" for him because he bullied me, and he never knew it."

When Trevanion went to his little room under the tiles he stood for a long while at the window, looking at the stars. The great enchantment was upon him, though for the moment it was

no more to him than a perfume, and the colour of a sunset and haunting music.

But his path in the web had been marked for him, and it led him back to those chestnut woods through the early heat of a June day. The road from the hill-town was dry and dusty, and Trevanion was glad of the deep shade.

He was tired and the day was hot, and lying on his back, there he fell asleep.

The sound of someone playing on a flute awakened him, about an hour later. The notes were rather disjointed and jerky, as though produced by a man who was none too sure of his instrument.

Trevanion turned on his side and raised himself on one elbow so as to bring his head above the lip of the hollow in which he was lying, expecting to glimpse old Cæsare evolving some freakish new canzonetta. What he saw was something quite different, and his surprise was so sudden that he lay there stiff and rigid, like a dog, motionless and at gaze.

Not twenty yards away a man was sitting at the foot of a tree, his back against the trunk. He was dressed in a green hunting suit; a fowling-piece lay on the ground beside him. Trevanion knew him at once by his mouth and his swarthiness and the arrogant bulge of his chin. It was Count Otto von Mirenbach of Castella Nero.

He saw von Mirenbach pull out a big silver watch, glance at it, unscrew his flute and slip it away in his pocket. The sun stood at noon. The hour had some particular significance.

Next moment he was out of his hollow and shadowing the man in the green through the chestnut woods, treading warily, his eyes set in a stare, his mouth a hard line. Von Mirenbach was going down towards the pool in the valley, his fowling-piece under his arm, his hat tilted over his eyes. He went no farther than the outer fringe of chestnut trees, and stood leaning against one of the dark trunks, his green figure almost invisible under the heavy shadows.

Trevanion turned away to the left and pushed on until a gap in the foliage gave him a view of the Satyr's Pool, and in an instant he understood the meaning of von Mirenbach's movements. A slim, white figure, showed there in the sunlight, a figure poised upon a flat rock that dipped into the blue water. It was Rosamunda at

the pool.

Now Trevanion was something more than a vagrant and a scholar. There was much of the Bayard in him, and not a little of the St. Francis. He loved trees and wild things, innocence, and good books, and beauty wherever he found it, but he was no fool. He could handle a duelling sword with any man, shoot straight, ride a vicious horse, and was hard and tough as a frontiersman.

He retraced his steps, sighted von Mirenbach still gloating behind his tree, walked down to within ten paces of him, and stood waiting. The ground was mossy here, and the Austrian had heard nothing. Some minutes passed before he happened to turn his head and awoke to the fact that he was not alone.

He faced sharply round, and stood with head up, like some proud beast, angry at being caught at a disadvantage, and for a minute or so these two men looked at each other without speaking a word. Then Trevanion walked straight at von Mirenbach, stopped within a yard of him, and stared him straight in the eyes.

It was an accusation, a challenge, and a warning. No words went with it; neither man uttered a sound. And Trevanion walked out into the sunlight, and down to the Satyr's Pool where Rosamunda was lacing her dress and shaking out the wet splendour of her hair.

Her eyes lit at the sight of him, for the child wisdom in her had hailed the playmate and the good comrade, yet to Trevanion her delightful and precious innocence had become a thing of difficulty and danger. Pan was alive and in the flesh, skulking red-mouthed in the woods up yonder.

Posed and challenged, the man in him chose simplicity, and threw away the scabbard. Of a sudden he loved this child, as he had never loved any living thing, and in this love of his he found an answer to all that troubled him.

"I have kept my promise. It was very easy to keep."

"And why was it easy, signor?"

"Because I gave you the promise."

She smiled and let him have her hand to kiss.

"I like you," she said, "are all Englishmen the same?"

"In what way, Rosamunda?"

"Your eyes look straight at me, and they tell me I have nothing to fear. What is it that I fear? I cannot tell. But that other day,

when you had gone, that other man came."

Trevanion still held her hand, and she made no movement to withdraw it. Moreover it was good that Otto von Mirenbach should see what he was seeing.

"What man, Rosamunda? Not Otto von Mirenbach?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I met him riding through the woods. And he did not please you?"

She answered quite simply.

"I ran away. He made me afraid. Why did he make me afraid?"

Trevanion looked straight into her eyes.

"Because he is evil and you are good. Because he is ugly and you are beautiful."

Her exquisite face was lost in a moment's seriousness, the questioning, wondering seriousness of a child.

"Am I beautiful?"

"You have only to look into the pool. But this man came to the villa?"

"Fra Tolomeo brought him. He spoke with my father about books, and some day father is to go to Castella Nero to see the man's library, but I shall not go."

"You are right, Rosamunda. The Austrian is evil, and no good friend for your father."

He had thought to try and tell her of von Mirenbach's spying upon her while she bathed, but her innocence made him keep silent, and his heart disliked the telling of it.

His seriousness touched her. There was no Atalanta spirit in her that day, and she went slowly up the steps with him as though some new emotion were stirring in her heart. She had never had a lover, and hardly knew the meaning of the word, but this tall man with the kind and shining eyes brought a new note into her life.

"Tell me," she said to him, "why do you live in Italy, and travel so far? Maria says it is only the rich people who travel."

He was touched and amused.

"Are you sorry for me because you think I am poor, Rosamunda?"

"It is not a sin to be poor. And you look so strong and happy."

He laughed, and loved her more and more.

"And so I am. And now I thank God for my strength and a clean life; but I am not poor, Rosamunda."

"It does not matter whether you are poor or rich. I hardly know what money is, and I am happy."

They reached the terrace, and saw Cæsare coming towards them, his flute under his arm. He looked rather madder and more dishevelled than before.

"Ah, it is the Tin Man, the scholar from Oyster Island! Hail, brother scholar! Get you in, child, and see to the wine."

He took Trevanion by the arm with an air of moonstruck solemnity, and began to walk him up and down the terrace.

"You did not believe me, sir, but the mystery is there, the great mystery. In three days we have the full moon."

Trevanion had a glimpse of Rosamunda looking at him.

"What is it that I do not believe, signor? And what of the full moon?"

"I am about to see the great god, sir, the great god Pan. For thirty years I have waited and never seen him. But yesterday I heard the pipes."

Trevanion gave him a quick and almost fierce glance.

"The pipes of Pan?"

"Yes, sir, the pipes of Pan. He is here, he is there, and on the night of the full moon he will come to the pool."

"Is that so?"

"And my daughter, sir, shall be there to do honour to the great god."

Trevanion faced round, caught Cæsare by the shoulder, and his other hand was ready for the old man's throat. But he mastered himself and that moment of anger and disgust, and stood there looking grimly into Cæsare's face, and wondering what to make of him.

"You are quite mad, signor," he said very quietly.

Cæsare blinked in his face.

"Mad, am I? We shall see, when the moon is full, and the gods steal down."

Trevanion dropped his hand from the madman's shoulder.

"Yes, we shall see, signor," he said; "we shall see. These mys-

teries are not to be trifled with."

He had realized Cæsare's hopelessness, and the perilous futility of trying to reason with him or to warn him. He thought of von Mirenbach haunting those chestnut woods and watching the pool. What if the Austrian had stolen the key of the old man's madness and had guessed how to use it?

But old Lombardi clung like a pestilence, sensing nothing of the Englishman's angry yet pitying scorn. They went in to their wine, and Rosamunda left them together when her father began to babble of the classics and to bring out his books. Trevanion was patient with him. The old fool needed subtle handling, and Trevanion gave him his voice, but kept his thoughts to himself.

The full heat of the day was upon them when Trevanion escaped and wandered out on to the terrace. He looked about him in the glare and heard Rosamunda calling him.

"Nigel! Nigel!"

She gave the name in soft Italian, and a smile came into his eyes. There was a little stone belvedere at the end of the terrace, overshadowed by a great pine and half hidden by trailing vines, and there Trevanion found her, sitting on an old bench carved out of chestnut wood, combing her hair.

"My father is very strange these days."

He bent over her.

"May I sit here beside you, Rosamunda?"

"Why — yes. Are we not friends?"

"I want to speak to you of your father, and it is not easy. Do not do all that he bids you do."

"But I do not understand."

"You are too good and too beautiful to understand some things, child. The time of the full moon will be dangerous for your father. And tell me, have you no friends near?"

"Friends? There is Maria; but Maria is always talking of Fra Tolomeo, and I do not like Fra Tolomeo."

"Yes."

"There are Sandro and Catarina at the farm. Sandro is a good man, and I love them very much."

"Where is the farm?"

"Down yonder, at the end of the valley."

Trevanion told himself that he would go and see Sandro and Catarina.

Her exquisite face had grown serious and a little sad.

"Why should the full moon be dangerous for my father?"

"Your father is not as other men, Rosamunda. Much learning has made him strange, and sometimes such men dream strange dreams."

"You make me afraid. And you will go away and leave me perhaps."

He bent and kissed her fingers.

"No, on my oath. I shall be near you, near you so long as you bid me stop. That is a promise, Rosamunda."

"Dear friend," she said, smiling. "I have known you but two days, and yet—I trust you."

"Go on trusting me," he answered, "and I shall be proud and happy."

He was loth to leave her; she seemed very much a child to him, a little triste, and a little lonely, and his man's tenderness went out to her.

"I am so sad to-day, Nigel, and yet I cannot tell you why."

He touched her arm very gently.

"Then, I am sad also. For you are the sunshine, Rosamunda, and when the sunlight is clouded——"

"Why must you go?"

"It is not for myself that I go, child. Some day I may tell you more of all this. And I will come to the Villa Lunetta to-morrow." He wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her, but he was shy of her innocence, and this new, swift love of his was a white flame.

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow," she answered him.

Trevanion made straight for the woods, and his path had a double end. He wanted no one to know of his going to Sandro's farm, and remembered that von Mirenbach might still be loitering there, and that the Austrian was armed. However, he saw nothing of the man in green, even though he lay low awhile and watched.

Half an hour later, Trevanion came down through a grove of beech trees and sighted Sandro's farm. The house lay in the valley, a low, white house half hidden by juniper, acacias, and a

smother of vines. There were a few rough outbuildings round it; some grazing land lay between it and the stream, and a stretch of vineyard on the opposite slope of the hill.

Trevanion noted all this with the keen eyes of a man who had fought and hunted. He saw a figure near the orchard wall, the figure of a big man in a white shirt and blue breeches, who was working amid the corn. The green stalks rose above the man's knees. Trevanion guessed that this was Sandro. He walked round by the stream and across the grassland to the elge of the cornfield. The man went on working, not troubling to look up till Trevanion was close to him, although he had seen him long ago.

"Good day to you, Farmer Sandro."

The man straightened himself and looked at Trevanion with a pair of grave, dark eyes. He was the old Roman type, eagle-nosed, square-chinned, hard as oak, reticent, practical, a good friend and a merciless enemy.

"Good day to you, Tadeschi," he said.

Trevanion smiled.

"I'm no Austrian, but an Englishman. It has been told me, padrone, that you are a good friend to the little lady of the Villa Lunetta. Is that so?"

Sandro's eyes narrowed a little.

"That is so, stranger. And what of it?"

"If you are her friend you will swear faith to her and to me."

"And who are you, stranger, that you ask me to swear oaths?"

Trevanion spoke straight at him, judging his fibre.

"Man, would it please you to see the little signorina in the hands of Otto von Mirenbach?"

"God forbid!"

"Then you are her friend, even as I am her friend. It is a strange household up there, padrone."

"Very strange, signor. But who are you?"

"An Englishman who travels as he pleases. I lodge at Monte Verde in the house of Luigi the bookseller. In England I own a great house and many farms. And, man, if you want the truth from me, know that I think of that little lady as my wife. Her father is mad, and that damned Austrian sneaks in the woods to see her bathing. The Pool of the Satyr — there is some tale about it, some

mystery?"

Sandro grew dark as a thundercloud.

"An old woman's tale," he said, "and yet — who knows! There are devils, signor, as well as men. Catarina, my wife, has worried about the little lady, because of that pool and her innocence."

"What is the tale, Sandro?"

"It was like this, signor. Once upon a time a girl used to bathe in that pool, just as the signorina bathes there now. In the old days the pool was sacred to the goat-god of the woods, and on certain nights at the full moon this goat-god has the power to escape out of Hades and run wild as of old. They say he found this girl bathing by moonlight and loved her, and next morning she was dead, floating in the pool. And the old women say, signor, that the girl must be fair-headed and that the goat-god goes mad when he seizes La Bionda."

Trevanion looked very grim.

"Old Cæsare knows that tale, Sandro. He waits for the goat-god at the next full moon, and would make his child bathe there at midnight!"

Sandro crossed himself.

"It must not happen," he said, "the old man is possessed by a devil. Even if no harm came of it, it is an infamy, for the little lady is an angel."

Trevanion held out his hand.

"Padrone, we can trust each other. I shall watch that pool each night till the time is past, but Monte Verde is too far for me, nor have I any reason to think that the Austrian loves me over much. I could make a shelter in the woods, and if you could sell me food?"

The Italian was more generous.

"My house is yours, signor. You can be as secret as you please. No one need know that you are here. And when will you come?"

To-morrow. I must see Luigi, and get him to spin a tale for me — say I have gone to Rome."

"Good. Then to-morrow."

III

TREVANION reached Monte Verde about dusk, just before the gates were closed, and since a couple of peasants were quarrelling with the guard, he passed through unnoticed. The via Flavia was very dark, and there was no light in the bookseller's house, but Luigi was sitting on the stool among his books, listening and waiting.

"So it is you."

He closed the door quickly behind Trevanion.

"I wondered whether you would return, my friend. People are becoming interested in you here, so interested that von Mirenbach's *sbirri* visited my house to-day."

"The devil! At what hour?"

"Less than two hours ago. I lied to them, and said you had left, and had spoken of Rome."

Trevanion was greatly disturbed.

"Luigi, I must not be meddled with by these fools. And von Mirenbach has his reasons."

"If you take my advice you will get out of the town to-night."

"But the gates are shut."

"I will show you a way out of the town. A little nerve is needed and a steady head; it is not that I am a coward, sir, but if you have offended the Austrian——"

Trevanion was in no mood for tarrying.

"Wait while I get my sword and pistols and put a few things into my haversack. You will have to hide what little is left, Luigi, the things are yours, and here is what I owe you."

"Tut, tut, never worry. I will wait here for you. The swine may come back any minute. It is their way."

Trevanion was with him again in less than five minutes, and Luigi led the way out into the garden. He stood listening a moment, and then moved forward into the darkness. The moon was not yet up.

"Give me a hand with the ladder, friend. It is just long enough to get a man on to the city wall, but too short for the other side."

They carried the ladder to the end of the garden and reared it against the grey stones. Luigi went up first, bidding Trevanion wait a moment. A path ran along the top of the wall, linking up

the old towers and bastions.

"All is quiet. Come."

Trevanion joined him on the wall. They moved along it for about fifty yards till something dark and huge loomed up close to them. It was a big cypress tree that grew close to the wall, so close that its branches brushed against it.

"There is your ladder. I have used it more than once; you jump well into the thick of the foliage, and get your arms round the trunk."

"Thanks, Luigi; you are a good friend."

"Have you any food?"

"Enough for the morning; after that I shall manage. Tell them I have gone to Rome. Good-bye."

Half an hour later there came a knocking at the bookseller's door. Luigi opened it, candle in hand, and with the air of a man who was sleepy and on the point of going to bed.

"Who's there?"

A big fellow pushed in, and some half-dozen more were ready to follow him. He held a pistol at Luigi's head and grinned cheerfully.

"Not a sound, old man. We are going to search this house for this Englishman."

"I have told you that he left this morning, and spoke of travelling to Rome."

"Yes, no doubt; but he was seen at the Mola gate about dusk."

"Well, he is not here; I have not seen him."

The sergeant of the *sbirri* left a guard at both doors, and went up with Luigi and the rest of his men to search the house. They missed nothing, not even a cupboardful of old clothes and lumber, but they found no Englishman, and came down disappointed. The garden and the cellar were equally unsympathetic, and the *sbirri* did not happen to notice the ladder lying along a fence and half hidden by rank herbage and vines.

Luigi pretended to sulk.

"What did I tell you, but you thought me a liar. A nice state of things when a quiet old man has his house turned upside down after dark."

"Basta," said the sergeant far less cheerfully, "he is in the town

somewhere, and we shall find him."

The little bookseller said nothing, but banged the door on them.

About the time that Trevanion was making his escape from Monte Verde, the woman Maria had thrown a dark shawl over her head and slipped down through the garden of the Villa Lunetta to a place where the wall had fallen and never been repaired. Someone was waiting for her there, someone who chuckled softly, and took his kisses as he pleased.

"Ten gold pieces, my love, for you, and twenty for me. It is only necessary that you should not meddle, that you should be asleep or deaf."

The woman agreed.

"And no harm shall come to the child?"

"Harm! If it will harm her to become a countess — well, the answer is 'Yes!' But my noble friend is an original, and goes about his wooing like a romancer."

"And when will it happen?"

"When the moon is full."

"And the old man?"

"He can become the count's librarian at Castella Nero. As for me, Mrs. Mischief, I shall be in great favour."

"You are an old rascal," she said, laughing.

Just as dawn was breaking, Nigel Trevanion came to the edge of the beech wood over against Sandro's farm.

Trevanion took no chances. He went down through the cornfield on his hands and knees, crawled through the garden hedge and sat down to wait with his back against the house wall. It was not long before he heard someone stirring in the house. A shutter was thrown open, and a man's head appeared, the head of Sandro the farmer taking stock of the morning.

Trevanion gave a soft whistle and held up two fingers. Sandro stared hard at him a moment, nodded, and disappeared from the window.

They went into a corner of the orchard together and talked.

"The Austrian is after me, padrone. I slipped out of Monte Verde last night. They have been told that I have taken the road to Rome. If you can hide me here for two days?"

"That should be easy."

"And it is necessary that I should see the Little Lady without going to the Villa Lunetta. Von Mirenbach must not know that I am near."

Sandro meditated a moment.

"I have a strange hiding-place that no one knows of save myself. As for the Little Lady, I can go and tell her that Giuseppe is ill."

"And who is Giuseppe?"

"My boy of six. He is a great favourite. As to my men, they would be in the fields, and even if they discovered anything they would hold their tongues."

IV

ABOUT nine o'clock that morning Sandro walked into the court yard of the Villa Lunetta, and found Maria at work at her wash-tub under the big fig tree.

Now Sandro had no great love for Maria; they had quarrelled more than once, and Sandro's wife, who had a quick eye for a jade, had warned him against her.

"Good day to you, Maria."

She looked at him with her hard black eyes and went on with her washing.

"Is the signorina in the house?"

"She may be. You know what the signorina is. She may be anywhere."

"Then I will go in and see for myself, since you are too busy."

He turned towards the house, but Maria followed him.

"Since when have you become a gentleman to walk as you please into the house of a Lombardi?"

"Hold your tongue, Maria. Am I to stand and wait on your whims and temper? My boy has the fever, and the signorina cured him last fall with a touch of her hand."

"Black magic, perhaps."

"White magic, you slut. The Little Lady has the hand of a saint."

Rosamunda was alone in the great salon. She looked up at Sandro, smiling.

"Good morning, padrone."

"Good morning, signorina."

Maria hung in the doorway, alert and meddlesome, but Sandro waited till she had gone.

"Giuseppe has the fever, signorina. He cries out for you, because your touch healed him last leaf fall. Perhaps you will come to the farm?"

"Poor Giuseppe! I will come now, Sandro; I will walk back with you."

She jumped up, and reached for her big sun-hat that lay on the couch.

They were half way to the farm before Sandro told her the truth, and in the telling of it saw her eyes grow big and shadowy and the colour deepen in her cheeks.

"The signor Nigel! And Giuseppe is not ill! But why is there danger, Sandro; who would do us any harm?"

"This English lord can explain things better than I can, signorina, even though he speaks in Italian. I judge a man by his eyes."

When they came to the house Sandro's wife was waiting for them, a big, sunny woman with a soft voice and wise eyes.

Sandro glanced at his wife, and Catarina understood. She led Rosamunda across the little courtyard, under a stone arch and into the orchard. There was a well in the orchard, its mouth surrounded by a stone well-head, and covered by a shelter of timber and thatch. It was half hidden by a trellis of vines so that the well-head was almost concealed by a curtain of leaves.

"He is there, signorina. It is a secret."

Trevanion had heard their voices. He was leaning against the stone coping, looking rather dusty and unshaven, and with a green smear on one sleeve, but his eyes were the eyes of a lover, and Rosamunda saw little else. She went and stood beside him behind the screen of vines, her sweet face serious and questioning, her eyes looking straight into his.

"What does it mean?"

"I could not keep my promise to you, Rosamunda, and since I could not come to you, I asked Sandro to bring you to me."

"And you are hiding here?"

"Yes, in the well, if necessary."

"The well!"

"There is a funny little chamber opening from it, and it is quite dry and warm."

"But why are you hiding?"

"Because the Austrian, Otto von Mirenbach, considers me in the way, and would like me in one of his prisons, but I do not mean to be put out of the way, Rosamunda, till the full moon is done with."

She looked troubled.

"The full moon! Always it is the full moon! My father is stranger than ever. It is his wish, Nigel, that I should bathe in the Satyr's Pool at midnight on the night of the full moon."

"And you will do it?"

"Yes, if it will please him. For what is there to fear? I have asked Maria to come with me."

Trevanion opened his lips to speak, and then smothered the words that were on his tongue. Why should he shock her innocence, tell her that lewd fable, and make her afraid of the thing that lurked in the woods? No harm could come to her so long as he was free to watch, and if von Mirenbach trusted to guile, guile was the sword to meet him with.

"Rosamunda."

He took her hands.

"I want you to trust me, dear."

"I trust you," she answered him simply.

"If anything should happen to me, trust Sandro, and no one else; he is good and brave and will protect you. Tell no one that I am here."

Her face drew near to his.

"But why are you in danger? Why should the Austrian hate you? I do not understand."

"Perhaps some day soon I will tell you," he said; "but do not worry your heart about me. If Sandro should come again to the Villa, and say that Giuseppe is sick, go with him at once, and leave everything to Sandro."

And then, quite suddenly, she drew very close and put up her face to be kissed.

"How good you are. I feel that you are being good to me, even

though I do not understand. Have men such secrets?"

He held her hands, and kissed her forehead.

"Sometimes, yes; we lay our cloaks in the mud, dear, so that your feet may not be soiled. Trust me; that is all I ask of you. And now, you must go."

Sandro walked back with her to the Villa Lunetta, and when he returned to the farm he found von Mirenbach's *sbirri* there, drinking wine, and resting in the shade. An Austrian officer was in charge of the band, a bluff, good-natured booby who sat himself down in the kitchen and suffered Catarina to cook him an omelette and bring him a bottle of Asti. He was bored with his business, and scoffed at it quite frankly.

"Good day, padrone. Your good lady has saved my life, for I was choked with dust and with the bad language of my men."

Sandro sat down and stared at him stolidly.

"You are very welcome, captain. There are no brigands in these parts, surely?"

"Brigands!" the Austrian laughed; "nothing so exciting, padrone, nothing but some scarecrow of an Englishman, who is supposed to have political views that do not please us. He escaped out of Monte Verde, and my orders were to make sure that he is not in these woods. I suppose you have no six feet of English madness hidden on your farm?"

Sandro stared.

"Is it likely, captain! But I ask you to search the place."

"I will take your word, padrone."

"No, sir; I would have you search the place. A man has to be careful these days. The fellow might be in my barn, or hiding among the faggots, and I never know it."

So the farm was searched, Sandro himself going with the captain and showing a serious interest in the affair. No one thought of looking down the well in the orchard, and they would have seen nothing if they had, save a length of brown rope disappearing into the darkness. The Austrian scoffed at the fuss he had been ordered to make, mounted his horse, and marched off with his men.

The day passed very slowly for Trevanion. He lay on a bundle of straw in that quaint hiding-place of his, watching the glimmer of light in the dark throat of the well, and listening to the faint

drip of water below. The inaction irked him, for he was a man in love, cooped up, blind for the moment, the sport of a quick imagination.

About dusk Sandro came to the well, and whispered down it.

"Signor?"

"Hallo!"

"It is very quiet. I have been up to the woods. The Austrian and his *sbirri* must have gone on to Musa."

The brown rope tightened to Trevanion's weight. His head and shoulders appeared.

"Hallo! it is growing dark. I am going up to the woods, Sandro. Supposing you come with me."

"I am ready, but some wine and a little supper? I have it here."

"Excellent. I don't like your 'guest's hole,' padrone. It makes one think too much."

It was growing dark when Trevanion and the farmer struck the fringe of the woods.

They moved on, Sandro in front a little, with a cudgel over his shoulders, striding slowly in a world of puzzling shadows.

Suddenly Sandro stopped, and Trevanion stopped with him like a man jerked by a string.

"Listen!"

From somewhere, very faint and near, came a queer sound of piping, very wayward and strange.

Big Sandro was stiff and bristling like a dog.

"Cæsare — perhaps?"

Trevanion had held his breath to listen.

"I think not," he said; "it is the goat-god calling the moon."

"Sst, signor, but you do not believe such things?"

"I believe what I see."

They went on again, for the piping had ceased, and when next they heard it the sound seemed much nearer. Then an abrupt silence fell, a silence that was more uncanny than that wayward music without a tune.

Sandro was sweating.

"Did you notice anything, signor?"

"I saw nothing."

"No; but the creature must have been quite close to us and we

never heard the sound of its feet. It was running too, for the sound came to us very fast."

Trevanion was puzzled, but he was less superstitious than the Italian.

"Where are we now?" he asked.

"About two furlongs from the Pool, so far as I can judge."

They came at last to the open ride that led down to the big chestnut wood above the Satyr's Pool. They lay down there, close together, between the roots of a great tree, and heard that Pan's music break out again at no great distance. It seemed to come from behind them in little trills and bird notes that suggested the beginnings of a melody, and then broke into mad fooling. Big Sandro crossed himself, and twisted round so as to face the sound, but it died away again, and they could hear nothing but the stream running.

Presently the moon rose, and added a new mystery to the woodland, and with the moonlight came a new and grotesque figure, the black shape of an old man with long hair, dancing like a madman and playing on a pipe.

Sandro nudged Trevanion.

"It is Cæsare. Did I not say it was Cæsare?"

"Listen. Tell me what you hear."

And Sandro shivered, for there was another piping in the wood, the piping that had haunted them since nightfall, and it seemed to answer Cæsare as one bird answers another.

"There is an evil spirit here, signor."

"Sst, make no noise. If it is the goat-god we may see him."

Old Cæsare went skipping past them, and was lost among the trees.

"That old man has sold himself to a devil, signor."

"I have seen that devil by daylight, Sandro, and it may be that he is of the same flesh as you and I."

They saw no more of Cæsare, though that capricious piping still sent an occasional shiver of mystery through the moonlit woods. Trevanion was lying with his chin resting on his crossed forearms, very wakeful and alert, and full of shrewd surmises.

"Your bed is waiting for you, padrone. I shall stay here to-night."

"You are not afraid, signor?"

"Not yet. And I can sleep in that precious hole of yours to-morrow. Go back by way of the stream; you will see me soon after daybreak."

Trevanion had learnt the patience of a hunter, and his patience brought him his reward at the end of that long night's vigil. The luck of the day, too, was with him, a luck that had always been his since boyhood. Just when the world was on the edge of dawn, and the great trees were growing grey, he heard a sudden cracking of dead wood behind him, and something very like an honest, human oath.

In the grey light of the dawn he saw a man scramble down the trunk of a tree, and make off into the wood.

Trevanion waited ten minutes, listening, watching before he moved. Then he raised himself cautiously, and went forward, keeping his eyes fixed on that particular tree. About seven feet up the trunk a black gash showed in the bark, broadening upwards till it lost itself in the spread of the main limbs.

Trevanion's eyes gave a gleam of light. He went up to the tree, got his right hand in the cleft, worked himself up, and discovered a part of the mystery. The tree was hollow.

He knelt there, looking down into the dark hollow, and thinking. This was the piper's post, where a man could lie hidden, and by a cunning use of his instrument make his music seem far and near. He could blow hard and soft, smother the sound deep in the bowels of the tree, or climb up and let his piping float out as from a musician's gallery. Trevanion smiled.

Before he left for Sandro's farm he looked about him and found what he desired, a big oak tree standing a little apart, its branches nearly touching the ground. The main fork of the tree was like a great nest where a man could lie curled up and concealed. The hollow chestnut could be watched, and when Trevanion had made sure of this, he walked back through the woods to Sandro's farm.

V

ROSAMUNDA came to the farm of her own free will that morning. Trevanion was asleep in his "guest's hole," and to wake him Catarina had to let the bucket clatter against the well wall.

"Hallo, signor!"

"Who's there?"

"A visitor, signor."

Catarina went off smiling, with her bucket of water.

Trevanion's face was very close to Rosamunda's when he reached the top of the rope, and he hung there a moment like a lover at a window. She stretched out her hands to him with an impulsive welcome that had the sweetness of a caress, and Trevanion caught one of her hands and kissed it.

"Why are you here, Rosamunda? Has anything happened?"

"No, but I was troubled, and I could not sleep last night!"

"And why?"

"Because I was thinking of you here, and of your danger."

"Dear heart, I was never happier in my life, and safe here in Sandro's farm. Have you any news for me from the Villa Lunetta?"

"None; but that father cannot rest or eat. He wanders all day, talking to himself. He has the same strange wish that I should go down to the pool to-morrow at midnight."

"And you will go?"

"Yes, to please him. What harm can it do to satisfy a mad whim? I have spoken to Maria, and she will come."

Trevanion had swung himself on to the wall. She was so dear to him now that even the thought of touching her seemed very wonderful. She made him think of some soft, trustful bird, but her eyes were the eyes of a woman.

"You must not come to the farm again, Rosamunda, unless you are in trouble."

"Then I shall not see you."

"Yes, you will see me, for I do not think that I could live now without seeing you. When the full moon is past, we shall begin our fairy story."

"Always the full moon! I am beginning to hate the full moon!"

"Cara mia," he said to her, "trust me for two more days. That is all I ask of you."

It was Sandro who kept watch that night, lying under the arbutus trees near the Satyr's Pool with an old musket for company. He saw nothing but Cæsare wandering like a sleep-walker and staring at the moon; nor did he hear any sounds of the pipes in the woods

across the valley. Sandro was back at the farm well before daybreak. Trevanion had to be roused so that he could reach the woods before dawn and get to his post.

Sandro slid down the well rope.

"Signor."

"Hallo! Any news, Sandro?"

"I saw nothing but old Cæsare, moonstruck and solemn. Nor did I hear any of that devil's music."

"Good. I will follow you up. Catarina has filled my knapsack with food. You will not see me again, Sandro, till we have finished with the full moon."

Trevanion was in the woods well before daybreak and safely posted in the fork of his oak tree. The spread of the old trunk was like a flat basket, and he could curl up in it and lie hidden with the dome of leaves screening him above. The hollow chestnut tree was visible through a gap in the foliage. Trevanion had fastened a spray of oak leaves over his hat, so that he could look out over the edges of his eyrie and keep the whiteness of his face from betraying him to any bird of prey who might perch in that tree over yonder.

The day passed at last, with the setting sun sending long rays of light into every woodland eyelet-hole and window. The cool of the evening was in comradeship with Trevanion's quickened suspense.

And then he stiffened and raised his head like a startled dog.

A moment later he saw the thing that he had heard, a strange, hairy thing that trotted on goat's legs, and whose throat, arms and shoulders were white like a man's. It was the figure of Pan, Pan himself, old Cæsare's woodland god, and Trevanion saw it lift itself up into the chestnut tree and disappear.

VI

MAESTRO LOMBARDI had been very restless all that day, and about sunset Rosamunda heard the sound of strange laughter, laughter that made her afraid. Going out to see the meaning of it, she found her father skipping up and down the terrace, laughing and beating time with his flute to some quite mad and imaginary music.

"Thrice Blessed Virgin, it is the night of the great god. To-night

the pride of your father will be complete. Pan comes, my daughter; Pan the great lover!"

She shrank away and fled into the house.

"I am afraid, Maria, afraid of something that I can feel but cannot see or hear. There is a something in my father's madness."

"It is the moon, signorina; nothing but the moon."

"Maria, I shall not go down and bathe in the pool to-night."

"S-sh, s-sh, it is nothing but fancy! I will go with you, signorina, and it is best to humour the old man."

"You will not leave me, Maria."

"*Cara mia,* why should I leave you?"

Trevanion spent quite five minutes in getting out and away from that oak tree. He had waited till it was dark, and then slipped down the trunk with the caution of a man creeping from a prison and with an enemy on the alert hardly thirty paces away. He had had to leave his sword in that crow's nest, for the thing would have cumbered him, but he had kept his pistols.

He got on his feet as soon as he judged it safe, and made his way down through the open woods towards the Satyr's Pool. It was very dark now, but he was glad of the darkness. Reaching the valley, he turned slightly towards the left and walked on very slowly pausing often to listen. It was his plan to strike the half-dry stream that was the overflow from the pool, and work up it till he reached the pool itself, for should any of the Austrian's people be on the watch, there was less chance of his blundering into them if he followed the stream.

The plan worked well. He crawled the last fifty yards, till his hands touched the flattish rocks around the pool and he saw the level gleam of the water with the silver point of a star reflected in it here and there. He remembered that a stunted old laurel grew on the south side of the pool. It was visible as a bunch of blackness, and he crawled to it and crept in under the branches. As he squirmed himself comfortable, his hand touched something hard and round and heavy. It was an old water-worn stone about the size of a six-pound shot, a thing that persuaded his fingers that it might have its uses where pistols were not to be trusted.

The night was extraordinarily still, and when the moon heaved a yellow rim over the edge of the world the night seemed even

more eerily silent. Trevanion felt like a taut wire. He had raised himself on his elbows, for he could judge now how he was placed with regard to his field of vision. The foliage of the laurel hung short of the ground, much like a tent with the "flies" looped up, and Trevanion had no reason for quarrelling with his luck. He found that he could see most of the valley ahead of him, the fringe of the woods on his right, and on his left the white wall, wooden gate and the end of the stairway leading up to the villa. The laurel hid him in its smother of black shadow. He could not have been more cunningly placed.

The first sounds he heard that night were the shrill notes of a pipe and bursts of faun-like laughter. The laughter sent a little shiver of emotion through him. It was so mad, so unrestrained, so gloating, so naïvely exultant. Then old Cæsare appeared crowned with vine leaves, and dancing in the moonlight.

On the terrace of the Villa Lunetta the madman began piping under his daughter's window. Rosamunda was seated on her bed, filled with a dread of some vague horror, a kind of ghost fear that made her eyes look like the eyes of a frightened child.

She went to the window.

"Father!"

He stretched out his arms to her.

"Hail, virgin; hail, fortunate and sacred one!"

Then she heard Maria's voice in the room.

"Tst, it is near midnight, *cara mia,* and when the play is over and the old gentleman happy, we can please ourselves and get to bed. To-morrow he will be himself again. It is the moon."

"I cannot go, Maria!"

"Courage, signorina; it is just a child's game played to please a child. I have brought you a cup of warm wine."

"You will stop with me, Maria?"

"Have I not promised?"

That warm wine had poppy seeds crushed in it, but Rosamunda drank it and suspected nothing.

Maria threw a cloak over the girl's shoulders, and they passed out of the house, across the moonlit terrace, and down the steps between the black ilexes and pines. Cæsare had vanished, and they heard his piping and his laughter in the valley below, and when

Trevanion saw him he was capering up and down like a faun calling on another faun to come and romp in the moonlight. Trevanion forgot the madman for a moment, for he heard a sound of women's voices and saw figures moving down the steps. They came out through the little gate, Rosamunda first, the woman following her, and from the uncertain and almost shrinking way she moved Trevanion knew that Rosamunda was afraid.

His heart went out to her with fierce tenderness, but he lay still and bided his time.

Then Cæsare came into his view again, a figure that had grown silent and attentive and strangely sinister. He had drawn near and yet stood aloof, arms folded, head cocked, very straight and stiff. Trevanion could have sworn that his ears were pricked and that there was a mad leer on his face.

A quick glance to the right showed him an empty sweep of moonlit ground ending in the blackness of the woods.

Nothing moved there. Pan still tarried.

"Maria!"

Rosamunda's voice brought Trevanion's eyes back to the pool. She was standing on the flat rock which she always used, and Maria had taken her cloak. Trevanion saw her white hands unfastening the laces of her dress, and she had shaken her hair free so that it hung in a cloud.

"Maria!"

"Cara mia?"

"Have you the towel? It will be so cold, Maria, and I feel so sleepy."

"Tut, tut, go in to your knees and no further, signorina. It should satisfy the old man."

The dark dress dropped and lay in a ring about her feet. She was in white now; her hands seemed to fumble, and her face was like the face of one dazed. Trevanion was on his knees, tense, awed, counting this night a sacrament, love, pity, and a great anger stirring in his heart. He was watching Maria, the woman, for the whole vile wickedness of the thing seemed to hang upon her treachery.

"Maria, are you there?"

"Behind you."

"Take my necklace. It's all so strange; I feel I am falling asleep."

"Tut, tut! It will soon be over."

The last white drapery fell about Rosamunda's feet, and as it fell Trevanion saw the woman start, turn quickly, and move stealthily away. She threw a half-frightened look behind her as she went, and that glance of hers gave Trevanion his warning.

"Good God!"

For old Cæsare had sent up a strange, exultant cry, and was standing like a man in an ecstasy, staring at the goat-god of his dreams. It had come leaping from the woods, and was within a stone's throw of the pool before Trevanion turned and saw it, a great creature of hair and nakedness with horns showing black on its forehead. So close was it that Trevanion uttered the oath of a man who has been caught asleep at his post. He groped for that stone of his, and broke out into the moonlight.

He was late, late by two score yards, and that cry of Rosamunda's was like a bitter cry of accusation. He had one glimpse of her in the creature's arms, a white figure that drooped and struggled feebly, head drawn back, hair hanging. Trevanion made never a sound, but his eyes were the eyes of a man who meant to kill.

Cæsare's Pan had thrown the girl to the ground and was bending over her, when he heard the sound of a man running and glanced up. His eyeballs shone white in the moonlight. His lower lip seemed to droop and to show his teeth.

"Von Mirenbach!"

That challenge answered. The thing's hand went to its hairy belly, and drew out something that flashed. He was up and striking at Trevanion, but Trevanion was too quick for the Austrian. His hand whirled; the stone found Pan's face and that god of hair and of horns fell forward and lay still.

Old Fagus

IT WAS A VERY OLD GARDEN.

John Osbald, the gardener, had worked in it for nearly forty years, and even in his time the soft, blurred texture of the red brick wall had changed but little. It had changed much less than the gardener's face, for the red wall of "Bassets," drank the wind and the rain, and old John's complexion owed something to ale as well as to the weather.

He was a hale, upstanding, handsome old fellow, a bit of an oddity, and something of an autocrat. In the village of Bury St. James he was held to be a man of repute, "Mr. Osbald o' 'Bassets'," very wise in the ways of all things that grew. Other men came to him for advice. "Ask old John."

So at seventy he looked what he was, white and wise-headed and fresh of face, a man who had a right to feel that he was somebody in those parts. The garden at Bassets was part of him and his pride. He might be the tyrant of the potting-shed; it was his privilege to be incredibly obstinate, and to rule his under-gardener and boy as they deserved to be ruled. John Osbald was very much a person.

For he had been fortunate in those whom he served: both plants and people. He had been grower of flowers and fruit to the Tremaines, and the Tremaines had treated him as they treated the garden, lovingly and with the respect of those who live on the soil. The garden was — in a sense — John Osbald's garden; also, it was John Osbald, blood and muscle and soul of him.

Bury St. James looked at things in the same way. The old red Jacobean house was Tremaine; but the lawns and the borders and the yew hedges and the cedars and the fruit trees were John Osbald. The stone pillars of the great gates carried two shields, and upon them were the arms of the Tremaines; but upon the iron gates themselves hung a fairy scroll upon which was written — "John

—His Garden."

He loved it. For years he had given it all that was strong and patient and cunning in himself. He loved every tree, but particularly did he love the great beech tree by the postern gate close to the ivy-covered garden house. Every morning of his life John entered by that gate, and every morning he would look up at that stately tree.

He saw it in its naked, winter symmetry, in the young sheen of May, in the massive greenness of summer, in the splendour of autumn.

Almost he raised a hat to that tree. They knew each other, and between tree and gardener there was mystic understanding.

"Good morning, Old Fagus."

"Good morning, John."

So, for years, they had greeted each other, and the tree had seemed to stretch friendly hands over the figure of the working man.

But the Tremaines were a failing force. The two sons were killed in the Great War. Old Roger Tremaine died soon after peace had been declared; and his wife lasted two years longer—a sad woman who had wandered about the garden as though it was a place of ghosts. She and old John had been the last ones left.

"It seems so strange, John, so very strange, to be here alone."

She had looked like a Christmas rose, trying to flower for the last time in the deeps of winter, and before the Lent lilies bloomed, she was dead.

John Osbald emptied his hot-houses to grace her coffin, and said deep silent things to the great beech tree.

"You and I go on, Old Fagus, but you'll last longer than I."

Bassets went to a cousin, but the old ways and means were dead. Somerset House had to have its blood money, and the Tremaines were not the Tremaines of a memorable tradition. Bassets was put on the market, and was bought by a gentleman, one—Percy Prance—head of a syndicate that operated provincial music-halls and theatres. This gentleman had been knighted during the war. No one knew why; but that did not matter.

John Osbald and Sir Percy Prance met for the first time on a September afternoon. A bright young architect had descended upon

Bassets, an easy, accommodating fellow who lauded the new gentleman with "sirs." That there were to be changes, renovations, improvements, was evident. The motor-car had displaced the horse, and Olivia Tremaine's piano would be less than a memory when the loud-speaker got going.

Percy Prance himself was a "loud-speaker"—a trombone of a man. He was cheerful, florid, slightly greasy, with one of those resonant voices that continue like a fog-horn in thick weather. He was not a bad sort of man provided he had his way, but his way was rather like the track of saurian. There was more belly in him than brain.

These two men met on the terrace. Osbald had been sent for, and had come slowly from the fruit-garden with an expression of watchfulness in his blue eyes. Sir Percy had brought tea with him in the car. He stood with feet well apart on the terrace, his thick fingers rolling a cigar.

"You're Osbald, are you?"

He had been expecting Osbald to touch his hat, and Osbald did not touch it. He stood and looked at the knight. He was oak, not willow like the bright young architect.

"Yes—I be."

Sir Percy bit off the end of the cigar. He prided himself on having bitten off more than most men could chew. He was rather full of his new glory, and he expected to be treated with deference.

"What's your age?"

Osbald's blue eyes were unblinking.

"Seventy, come Michaelmas."

Sir Percy looked at him slant-wise out of his clever and commercial little eyes. He was not pleased with Osbald. He seemed to sense in Osbald a contumacy, a bucolic stiff-neckedness that did not bend as it should have bent to the new glory. Sir Percy believed that there was but one way to deal with such people, the prompt application of pressure. Always he had found such pressure effective, perhaps because he had had to deal only with a scared and sycophantic society that had to walk mincingly in the presence of a monopolist.

"Look here, my man, if you want to stay on here you had better

call me 'sir.'"

It was a fairly blatant letting loose of the realities of the new dispensation, and it seemed to catch John Osbald like a sudden icy wind in the eyes. The finger and thumb of his right hand picked at the flap of his pocket. Something very singular and terrible had happened. The new presence had promulgated a threat, and never before in his life had John Osbald been threatened.

He might be slow and deliberate both in speech and movement, but he was more sensitive than was the knight of such subtle variations as a changing sky or of sudden sunlight and the moods of men and of things. He had a quick understanding of what those words implied. Unless he truckled to this fellow with the flabby red face he would be sacked. He would come no more into this garden, and the garden of Bassets was himself. Even at seventy a man's soul may utter a bitter cry, and as old Osbald's fingers fumbled at the flap of his pocket he rolled shame under his tongue and swallowed it. Yet the whole business occupied but little more time than it would take to swing a scythe.

He nodded.

"As it may please you, sir."

"You've been here a pretty long time, Osbald."

Sir Percy smiled. He could be bland when the oil was applied. This was much better.

"Near forty years."

He forgot the "sir," and added it; and the knight noticed the delay in Osbald's production of the title. It annoyed him; it annoyed him more than had the previous omission. It was as though the badge of respect did not stick to him naturally.

"That's a long time. Do you think you're up to your work?"

Osbald fingered his chin.

"The Tremaines, they was satisfied, sir."

"Oh, I dare say; but I'm not a Tremaine, my man. I shall want changes here. You understand that, eh?"

Again his fat voice threatened, and old Osbald's eyes gazed past him at the house.

"Oh, aye, I've seen changes. I've kept this garden in high fettle for nigh on forty years. It's my job, sir."

Almost the oak of him trembled. His eyes were anxious.

"All right. I'll give you a trial, Osbald. How many men have you under you?"

"Another man and a boy, sir."

"Is that enough?"

"It was enough, sir, for the Tremaines."

And again the new knight was annoyed. Damn the Tremaines! It was his wish to efface the Tremaines, and to make "Bassets" "Prance" from tennis-court to garage, and here was this old brown stump of a man stuck in the soil and reminding him of rotten old traditions. He cleared his throat.

"One last word, Osbald. This place isn't Tremaine. It's me. You had better stick that in your pipe and smoke it. It's what I want about the place. See?"

Osbald looked strangely ashamed.

"I see, sir."

So the struggle between them began, though in old John's case the turmoil was inward and silent. He had surrendered and he knew it; he had humbled himself in order to stay with his beloved garden. He was an old man, and he had no soul left to him outside those red brick walls; he had grown into the very crevices of the place; he was rooted in it.

As for Sir Percy Prance his attitude to old Osbald was natural and inevitable. This old stump of a man irritated him; it was as though he was always catching his foot against this relic of the past, and yet he did not have the stump grubbed up. That was not his way. It is possible that he proposed to himself that the obstruction should crumble away piecemeal, and that, in a rather ugly sort of fashion he would enjoy the process. Most of his life had been spent in imposing his loud will upon other people.

The Prance family arrived and inserted itself into the new Bassets. My lady was large and equine, and very much "my lady." There were three scions of the new stock, two young women and a pup. There were chauffeurs, a butler, a footman, a lady's maid, and four motor-cars and other accessories. During that first winter old John saw the fruit-garden ripped up and replaced by a bright, new, red-surfaced tennis-court.

He groaned and endured. He addressed Florence Prance as "Your ladyship." He accepted her prancings and her tramplings.

His shoulders bowed themselves. He grew morose, and more and more silent.

But every morning he looked up at the great beech tree. "Changes, Old Fagus. You and I together. But I'll go and you'll stay. Maybe they'll grub me up; but you'll stay on, Old Fagus."

Spring came, and among other things Sir Percy brought a motor-mower and imposed it upon Bassets and old Osbald. A strong man and a boy had been good enough for the grass of the Tremaines, and to old John the new machine was like some beastly mechanical devil dropped from the planet Mars. Somehow he could not keep it in order, and it was rough in its treatment of his beloved turf. In fact, this noisy, self-assertive machine became associated in old Osbald's mind with Sir Percy Prance himself.

John might say: "I don't hold with these new-fangled things," but he did not say it. He was afraid of the machine; it was a sly and treacherous beast; it was always breaking down, and just as though it did it on purpose. Like Sir Percy it was trying to catch him out.

"You don't seem to get on very well with that mower, Osbald."

The old man looked frightened — sulky and frightened.

"I'll get the hang of it, sir."

"Perhaps, you're a bit old to learn."

Sir Percy was always saying to his wife: "I must get rid of that old fellow. He's not up to his job. But I'll give him his chance."

To Osbald her ladyship was the source of other sorrows. She knew nothing of gardening, but that did not prevent her from assuming that she did. She was devastation. She would send out a maid with a huge basket and a table-knife, and old John's delphiniums would be cut to the bone. She wanted everything that was new. She would go to flower-shows and nurseries, and come back with pencilled catalogues, and ask John if he had such-and-such a plant. And if not — why not? She hinted that he had never heard of it, that he was ignorant.

She caused a monstrous, rustic pergola to be built right across the sweep of John's favourite lawn. She had a mess of limestone piled around one of the cedars, and called it a rock garden. She possessed a restless, rooting energy, and no feeling for what was or what had been. And she was quite sure that Osbald was a can-

tankerous and ignorant old fool.

Now, according to their lights, the Prances were excellent people. They gave to charities, and encouraged trade, and paid their bills, but as for understanding the mystic marriage of mind to matter, that was beyond them. Old John had a wife, but he was married to two entities: his wife and his garden. Nor can such marriages be broken without mortal injury to the souls concerned. Sir Percival might talk with a certain loud assurance about music, but he never credited old John Osbald with a soul, nor did he realize that the old worker was attached inseparably to his garden.

John's wife knew it. The village knew it. All old men who laboured with their hands, understood this mystical reality.

The garden of Bassets was old John Osbald's garden. It belonged to him, and he to it. Sir Percival Prance might have paid so much money for the property, but deep down in the soul of the worker was the conviction that the garden was John Osbald's and not his.

Old John was not a very articulate person, but he could talk to his wife.

"I've been made to feel shame, mother, but I reckon I've got to swallow it. It's my job, isn't it? It's been my job for forty year."

She understood him, for was not their home, the cottage beyond the stables, dependent upon the pleasure of this same Percy Prance. Mary felt for her cottage much as John felt for his garden. She had grown into it. It contained the association of a life-time. It was—her.

So things continued for a season, and old John went about dumbly, and felt the loss of this and of that. He could say to himself, "They haven't got no feel for the place, but so long as I'm here I'll make up for it to the garden." But his sense of insecurity increased. Tranter, the man under him, glib, swarthy, sycophantic, had his eyes on John's shoes. He knew how to butter a cat's paws.

Inevitably the situation developed its crisis. Her ladyship was not a lover of trees. She was restless; she had a passion for altering everything that was; she liked to impose her will upon her surroundings. Her disapproval fell upon Old Fagus. The beech tree was superfluous, a nuisance; nothing would grow under it.

She said to Sir Percival: "That tree. It ought to come down."

Sir Percival agreed with her.

"Shuts out too much sunlight, what! I'll give Osbald orders. A tree like that's no use to anybody."

So the doom of Old Fagus was pronounced, and John Osbald was told by Sir Percival in person that the beech tree was to be felled.

Old John stood and stared. His hands, hanging limply, slowly clenched themselves. He had reached the limits of surrender.

"That there tree, sir, has stood there for two hundred years."

Sir Percival did not like John's tone.

"Well, it's coming down now. You see about it."

Old John moistened his lips.

"I won't have no hand in it. I've known that tree——"

The crisis was instant.

"You heard my orders."

"I did, sir."

"And you refuse?"

"I won't stand by and see that tree — felled."

Sir Percival Prance's ruddy face grew turgid.

"Oh, you won't! All right, you'll go. I've given you your chance here, Osbald. I'll pay you to the end of this month."

John stood stock still.

"That means——"

"Yes, I shall want the cottage. You had better look out for something down in the village."

Osbald said never a word. But he went and put on his coat, and walked out of the garden, and under the autumn foliage of the beech tree. He looked up at it.

"You've stood by me, and I've stood by you, Old Fagus."

He returned to the cottage and his wife.

"I've been sacked, mother."

He sat down in the rush-bottomed chair.

"After forty year. We've got to the end of the month. Reckon I'd better go down and see what I can get in the village."

Old Fagus fell to the axe and the cross-cut saw, and the Osbalds went to live in the village, but since there was no vacant cottage to be had, they were compelled to take lodgings. Old John managed to get one or two odd jobs, and the old people had their pensions, but Osbald did not keep his odd jobs long. He seemed

to shrink and to wither up. He lost his straightness, for he had been very straight in the back for a gardener; his head sank and his shoulders sagged. He had come to the end of his job, not happily so, but with a sense of being broken. In a spell of bitter January weather he caught a cold that went to his chest; but the village would not have it that it was the bronchitis that killed him. The village agreed with John's wife.

"They took the pride of his job away, and I tell 'ee it broke his heart. At his age, too. Things oughtn't to be done rough like that."

She did not outlive her man for many months, but died in the fall of the year, and was buried with him in Bury St. James's churchyard.

Sir Percy Prance, if he thought at all about the matter, considered the business of no importance. He had had to sack an obstinate old man who had become obsolete, and a mere obstructionist. The sycophantic Tranter stepped into Osbald's shoes, and was known in the village as Jim Lickspittle.

But that was not the end of the chapter. Sir Percy Prance did what he considered to be his duty by the village. He subscribed to this and that; he presented the Bury St. James's cricket club with a new pavilion; at Christmas he helped to dine the old people and the children. He was under the impression that he was popular in the neighbourhood, though certainly these rustics were a rather glum and silent lot. When her ladyship opened the village flower show the day happened to be wet, and the human atmosphere had a certain dampness. Moreover, Tranter's exhibits from the Bassets' garden did not secure a single prize, though the local postmaster, an ex-police inspector and the blacksmith were the judges.

Sir Percy was piqued. He could not understand it. He spoke to Tranter about it, and Tranter sneered.

"They're a nasty, jealous crowd, sir. They just ruled us out."

Came a day when politics were to the fore. An election was at hand, and Sir Percy, as a good citizen and a man of prominence, assumed the position that was his. Bury St. James was to have a meeting, and the electors were to be addressed by the particular candidate whom Sir Percy favoured. Sir Percy was to take the chair. He assumed that he had every right to occupy that chair.

There were people in the village who knew there would be

trouble, and that Bury St. James had been waiting for Sir Percy; but no one attempted to tell him so. The business had been boiling up, but the psychological occasion for an outburst had been lacking. Bury St. James was like a dour, watchful old sheep-dog that went about with its yellow eyes obscurely resentful under a mass of hair. It had not forgotten; it did not forget easily — it waited for the chance to bite.

The meeting was held in the village institute, no objection being raised to the use of the room, since both candidates were to hold meetings in it. It was a winter evening. Sir Percy and Lady Prance dined early, and were driven down in the big limousine. In spite of the night being cold and raw the roadway and the path leading to the village institute were crowded, and it was a crowd that allowed Sir Percy to arrive in silence. Yet, all those obscure figures and faces were mutely attentive, hostility paraded in the darkness, and Sir Percy was not aware of it. He had dined well. He and her ladyship were met at the doorway of the institute by Mr. Marter who kept the village shop, and Mr. Higgs one of the principal farmers. The room was packed.

Sir Percy and his lady were conducted to the platform. The knight had the air of a well-fleshed and successful man who felt himself lord and master of the occasion. Probably he expected applause, but there was no applause. The room remained strangely silent.

Mr. Marter looked anxious. He was one of those who knew how a working man felt about certain happenings. He could remember the days when a Tremaine had sat in that chair, and a Tremaine had always been listened to. When they reached the platform, Mr. Marter bent forward and whispered to Sir Percy Prance.

"The candidate isn't here yet, sir. He's coming on from Thornfield. Do you think we had better wait?"

Prance saw no reason why the meeting should not be opened. He had certain things to say to Bury St. James — loud, sonorous things.

"We may as well begin, Mr. Marter. I'll address them."

They mounted the platform, and seated themselves in the row of chairs. Sir Percy Prance looked at his audience, produced his notes, rose, and with a kind of shining, well-fed effulgence, pre-

pared to dominate and to declaim.

Suddenly, from somewhere at the back of the room, a man's voice broke the silence.

"Who killed old John Osbald."

For some five seconds the silence held. It was as though a stone had been thrown, and glass had been broken, and then from the back of the room, and from the packed doorway, and from the crowd outside, the voices stormed.

"We don't want to hear 'ee."

"Who killed old Osbald?"

"Get out o' that chair."

"If ye don't get out we'll throw 'ee out."

People rose to their feet. There was pandemonium. Men surged in, and tried to force their way towards the platform. Women screamed. The roar of voices continued, angry, ugly, unsilenceable. There was no doubt about the threatening sincerity of that country crowd.

Prance stood holding his notes. His face looked turgid and swollen. People saw his lips move. He was trying to say something. He did say something — and he said it with fury.

"It's a lie. If you fools can't be quiet ——"

He had to be hustled out of the room and by way of the door at the back of the platform. He swore and protested. Two police constables and a few supporters bunched themselves round him, not out of love, but because something had to be done when such a storm broke loose. But they could not get him to his car, for his car had been pushed off the road and upset into a ditch. They smuggled him down the dark path into the chuchyard where the old Osbalds lay, and across the churchyard into the vicarage garden. They put him into the vicarage, and went back to rescue the lady.

But when Bury St. James had extruded all that was Prance, it sat down and listened to Mr. Higgs of Tithe Farm, and later it listened to the candidate who had come on from Thornfield to speak to it. Bury St. James had expressed itself. It had fastened its teeth into a certain pair of trousers.

Meanwhile, Sir Percy stood on the vicarage hearthrug and said things to the vicar.

"Your people are a lot of damned savages. Mark you, I've done things for them. I've been generous. It's absolutely ——"

The vicar, a mild man, lit his pipe. His wife and her ladyship were together in the drawing-room.

"Oh, they take a little knowing, Sir Percy. They don't see things quite — perhaps — as you see them."

The knight seemed to swell behind his bulging shirt front.

"Savages. I wash my hands of the whole damned show. They'll never get another penny out of me. And that's that!"

That Vulgar Person

No one could understand why — when there were at least a dozen hotels in Belleplage — he should have chosen to stay at the Hotel Victoria, for the "Victoria" was eminently and aggressively the English hotel, and though he registered himself as British he did not look English as the Hotel Victoria understood it. His name was Sabbine. He was of a quite extraordinary plainness, and the Hotel Victoria, having prejudices of its own, found his plainness repulsive. Everything about him was ugly: his jowl, his negroid mouth, his complexion suggesting hot moist veal, his large hands, his massive thighs, his feet. He had little dark eyes tucked away in bladders of fat. He had a tummy. Quite inevitably the Hotel Victoria referred to him as "That gross person."

He appeared as a tropical figure, symbol of the New Riches, and probably a profiteer. Obviously he was very well-to-do. He was occupying the best suite in the hotel, and he had a valet. In the dining-room Gustave, the head-waiter, had assigned to Mr. Sabbine the most special corner by the window, with its view of the sea. The Victorians were shocked at Gustave, that he should be so obviously servile and a sycophant in search of tips.

No one spoke to Mr. Sabbine. He wore brilliants in his dress-studs, and collected on his table an amazing array of bottles. He was most excellently served. He was smiled upon by the staff, and cold shouldered by the guests.

Mrs. Horrocks, who had wintered for fifteen successive years at the Hotel Victoria, and who ran everything in Belleplage: the English church and the chaplain, and the library, and the Society for Salving Russian Refugees, disapproved instantly of Mr. Sabbine. Possibly his name suggested to her that most indecent incident in the history of Rome, and the vulgarities of Rubens. She spoke of him openly as "That gross person."

Seated at her table, which happened to be too close to Mr. Sabbine, she surveyed him like a desiccated Britannia whose urge was to use her trident, and to pitchfork Mr. Sabbine out into the street.

"I can't think what the man is doing here."

Colonel Blenkinsop, to whom everything was either pukkah or pariah, and who managed to be extraordinarily like the French cartoonist's idea of an Englishman, agreed with Mrs. Horrocks.

"Demned superfluous. A bottle-wallah with diamonds in his shirt-front! I must speak to Muller about it."

Muller was the manager, and when Colonel Blenkinsop did speak about it, the shrewd Swiss asked to be instructed.

"But what is the objection to the gentleman, sir? He is very quiet."

Quiet, indeed! Why the loudness of him screamed! But, of course, Muller could not be expected to distinguish such sounds emerging from the person of so profitable a client.

"Just freeze the fellah out."

That he should arouse such hostility was a subtle challenge to the League of Nations and to all those who preach brotherly love, but Mr. Sabbine appeared unaffected by it. He waddled about with an air of aloof good humour, and refused to be frozen. No one spoke to him save the staff, and he spoke to no one. And he conveyed to the world of the Hotel Victoria the impression that he was quite aware of the feeling of hostility he aroused, and was amused by it. Not only was he repulsive, but he was repulsively complacent. It was as though he gloried secretly in his grossness.

He sat on one of the green chairs in the garden and watched Belleplage playing tennis. He was there during the tournament when an Italian won the men's singles, and a German girl defeated the English tigress. He was seen to applaud, to clap his fat hands together. It was a subtle offence, for though the English are a sporting people, the English abroad — or some of them — retain prejudices. Colonel Blenkinsop still referred to the whole Mediterranean race as dagos.

He included Mr. Sabbine in that category.

"Registered himself as British. Demned alien."

Also, he was able to explain Mr. Sabbine's presence in the hotel.

"A fellah like that usually has something tucked away. Keeps it round the corner, you know."

Mrs. Horrocks looked shocked.

"You mean — a woman?"

"Precisely."

The hotel was particularly offended when it saw the young English tigress of the tennis court chatting to Mr. Sabbine in the ball-room. The Victoria danced twice a week. Someone impatiently expostulated with young England.

"What on earth made you speak to that man?"

"He spoke to me. Well, and why not? He's a rather decent old thing." For Mr. Sabbine had said — "May I congratulate you on losing as charmingly as you play." Which was true. For Mr. Sabbine liked young England better in some respects than he liked old England. It might be noisier, but it was less tolerant of humbug.

During the last week in February the English Club gave its yearly dance, and as usual it gave it at the Hotel Victoria. It was an invitation dance. Mrs. Horrocks presided at the committee, and with bottle-bright blue eyes and trident at the slope, held the seas sacred. The Duke was expected. He accepted the invitation yearly, but his acceptance was rather an act of courtesy, and being a man of seventy and a semi-invalid, he had every excuse to send his equerry to represent him. The Duke was a very great gentleman.

On the night of the dance Mr. Sabbine strolled down the gallery to the ballroom. He had an air of innocence, but at the ballroom door he was stopped by young Lovelace who had been placed there by the committee. Young Lovelace was a nice lad. He spoke gently to Mr. Sabbine.

"Your card, sir, please."

"I haven't a card."

"I'm awfully sorry, sir, but it's an invitation dance."

"I'm staying in the hotel."

Mrs. Horrocks had her eyes on the doorway. It is possible that she suspected young Lovelace of too much niceness, for she sailed down and intervened.

"Can I help?"

Mrs. Horrocks' offers to assist were ominous.

"This gentleman has no card."

"Have you explained?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Horrocks spoke with stateliness to Mr. Sabbine.

"This—is an invitation dance. Quite so. I need not explain that an invitation is essential. You will appreciate the fact that the committee——"

Mr. Sabbine made her a little bow.

"I must apologize. Being an old man, and a resident here, I thought——"

"We can make no exceptions——"

"I quite understand, madam."

He walked away, but later in the evening he heard Mrs. Horrocks' voice in the lounge on the other side of one of the white pillars.

"What a pity the dear duke could not come. He has to be so very careful. Yes; did you see that vulgar person try to get past young Lovelace? I soon settled that."

Mr. Sabbine did not pack up and go, for in spite of the unfriendliness of the residents he was very comfortable at the Victoria. His suite was comparatively quiet, and its windows were full of the unspoilt sea and sky. The hotel staff was very attentive. For some reason the staff liked Mr. Sabbine, for in those little dark eyes of his there was both sadness and laughter, an understanding of the why and the wherefore of life, humour and kindliness. He had carried about with him a preposterous and grotesque body, and yet had contrived to enjoy its very ugliness. It had provided him with mischievous provocations, delicate surprises, and at times it had made the obvious people look so shallow and foolish.

Placards appeared in Belleplage. They advertised a concert by Max Spindler the pianist, an artist better known in Berlin and Vienna than in London. The concert was to be given in the big salon of the Hotel Metropole, and Mr. Sabbine took a ticket. It was said that Spindler was going to play Debussy, and no other man could interpret Debussy with such delicacy and whimsicalness. A large part of the Hotel Victoria attended the concert, because it was the thing to do, and by some quite undeserved misfortune Mr. Sabbine found himself very much involved in that part of the audience. He had Colonel Blenkinsop behind him, and three

chairs away on his right Mrs. Horrocks and Miss Blaber had matters to discuss.

Mr. Sabbine felt uneasy. On his left he had heard a big German in spectacles saying to a girl of fourteen: "This afternoon you will listen to a great and exquisite artist, a man unique in his rendering of certain masters. It is a great privilege to listen to such an artist." Yes, the audience was cosmopolitan; it came to listen and to enjoy, but Mr. Sabbine knew by experience that the English of the Hotel Victoria were not musical. They could neither understand nor enjoy, and in the enjoyment efface themselves. They were apt to behave in the presence of a pianist like children at a pantomime remarking loudly upon the antics of a performing pig. It was distressing and exasperating. Moreover, Mr. Sabbine had exchanged a smile and a flutter of the programme with a certain little person in the audience who was intimately connected with the performer.

Colonel Blenkinsop kept clearing his throat. From the Horrocks and Blaber chairs, conversation floated.

"My dear, I don't know why I came here. I'm afraid I'm going to be awfully bored, but our bridge party fell through."

"Do you know anything about the man? What's his name? Spindly?"

"Spindler? Never heard of him before."

"It sounds German."

"Or Austrian."

"Well, that's much the same, isn't it. How they do overheat these places. I must get a window opened."

Mr. Sabbine felt uneasy. How was it that these people could never keep quiet, and must advertise their little stupidities? He caught the gleam of the stout German's spectacles — "Ach — these English, they will spoil everything."

And then Max Spindler appeared on the platform, a strange, lumpy figure in a frock coat, and of an ugliness that almost equalled Mr. Sabbine's. He seemed to have no chin, and his hair stood up uncouthly; his flaccid face was the colour of cream.

Most distinctly did Mr. Sabbine hear those words.

"My dear, he's just like a pig!"

Quite a number of other people must have heard them, including the little person who had waved to Mr. Sabbine. And Mr. Sabbine

felt hot. The Blaber woman was giggling — yes — actually giggling. "My dear — I — really — shall have to go out."

Spindler looked at his audience for a moment, and his glance seemed to rest on the Horrocks — Blaber chairs. Then he began, and the little gentle sneer seemed to melt from his face. Someone was tittering into a handkerchief, and the fat German leant across and glared. Sabbine sat very still. Really, it was deplorable. He had sat in the cheap seats at Queen's Hall in the midst of people who worked for a living, and he had felt their tense, exquisite silence. But these other English ——!

But Spindler had forgotten the women. He was away in that other world, a queer, grotesque figure becoming mysterious and beautiful in a mystery of sound. The fat German nursed his corporation and dreamed. His face had a radiance.

The piece was over, and Colonel Blenkinsop became vocal.

"Can't make head or tail of this new stuff. Sullivan's good enough for me. This fellah ——"

There were murmurings, for Spindler had struck the first notes of a thing of Debussy's. It flickered and flaunted puckishly; it played in and out of the shadows and the sunlight. And Colonel Blenkinsop blew his nose, vigorously and at his leisure.

"These dem places always full of germs. My doctor man says ——"

Mr. Sabbine turned on him and said softly: "Excuse me, sir, may I suggest that I have paid to listen to the music and not to your conversation?"

The fat German, understanding English, grunted ecstatically.

There was silence, save for one sniff from Blenkinsop. At the end of the piece he bent forward and touched Mr. Sabbine's shoulder.

"I'll trouble you, sir, not to address a stranger impertinently."

Mr. Sabbine smiled, and said nothing. What he wanted to say was: "Please blow your nose and blow it now."

Later, Max Spindler played something with an obvious tune to it, and Mr. Sabbine heard a buzzing behind him. Colonel Blenkinsop was humming. And in the hurry of applause at the end of the selection Mr. Sabbine heard him say: "Now — that was better. The fellah doesn't play so badly. I remember a sub of mine at Buddlebooda who could sit down and give you the Mikado —

yes, all of it — slap off. Not so much as a postage-stamp of music."

Mr. Sabbine murmured:

"Quite so."

When the concert was over and the audience drifted out into the lounge of the hotel, Mr. Sabbine remained behind. He knew that for one particular person the afternoon had been spoilt. She must have heard those words of the Horrocks' woman, and as he made his way towards Max Spindler's wife he wondered at the insensate vulgarity of the insular mind. Madame Spindler was fluttering her programme at him. She looked flushed.

"Oh, Sabbine, do I look murderous?"

She addressed him as Sabbine, and in the most English of voices, and with an impulsive and affectionate frankness. Mr. Sabbine raised her hand and kissed it. His little eyes twinkled.

"You did not know I was here. I am here. Max is better than ever."

"Yes? isn't he great. Where are you staying?"

Not for a moment would she confess that she had heard Mrs. Horrocks liken her husband to a pig. Her anger made her animated and pretty, like some inward glow, restrained and shaded.

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Victoria."

"Oh, Sabbine, why? It is so — English."

"And so are we, my dear, other English. Really, it amuses me. They think me a hideous and gross person, all greasy with the slime of war profits. It amuses me. You'll come and dine?"

"There? Never."

"Oh, yes, you will. We will amuse ourselves a little. Hallo, Max."

The two ugly men shook hands.

"Better than ever, Max; better than ever."

"Thanks to you."

"Nonsense. I was telling Rose that you must dine with me. She says 'never.'"

Spindler smiled at his wife.

"The applause did not satisfy her? Or the asides. You know, Sabbine, some of these people seem to think that the man at the piano is deaf. And I have such ears ——"

He laughed and without bitterness.

"They present us with pig's heads and bull's heads."

Sabbine patted his shoulder.

"You are a great artist, Max, and a master. He who can laugh at such people is — the master."

They dined at the Victoria and the Victoria stared rather rudely. It was Blenkinsop who said: "Well, that's a sight for the blind! The two ugliest fellahs in France. A couple of Calibans, what!" He chortled. "That Ike was rude to me. Tell him something? You bet I did. The woman with 'em ain't so bad. Wonder she can feed with two such faces." But not all the English were Horrocks — Blenkinsop. To a few Mr. Sabbine's reputation had gained distinction.

Mr. Sabbine had an idea.

"Max, I want you to give a concert. My particular show."

"I'll play for you — always and anywhere."

"In this hotel?"

The pianist looked surprised.

"If you wish it."

"Good. It will be a concert — for three. By invitation. May I arrange?"

"I play for you always and anywhere."

Mr. Sabbine inwardly chuckled, and next morning his car carried him up to the Villa Miramar, where a certain great gentleman lived. Mr. Sabbine sent in his card, and apparently the card was good value, for the man-servant returned to take Mr. Sabbine in charge.

"Will you come this way, sir, please."

Mr. Sabbine was led into the garden, and along a pergola to a sunny space where a very tall man with a white head and a face the colour of old red brick was pottering about in his shirtsleeves. Mr. Sabbine stood with his hat off in the presence of this tall old man.

"Hallo, Sabbine. Glad to see you. Bought any more pictures lately?"

"A few, sir. A Goya, and one or two Dutch pieces."

The great man put on his coat — a comfortable old coat. He was pleased to see Mr. Sabbine.

"Sit down. We are out of the wind here. Yes, there are some of

the irises I am trying. I have raised two rather charming hybrids of my own. I did not know you were here, Sabbine."

"Why should you, sir?"

"Oh, well, some people are worth hearing about. I meant to have come down to Spindler's concert yesterday, but I had a function. Were you there? But — of course — you would be there. How is Max?"

"Better than ever."

"What did he play?"

Mr. Sabbine ran through the programme, and the great man smiled.

"I wish I had been there. Is he playing again here?"

"That is what I have come to see you about, sir. I am having an afternoon of my own. If you would do me the honour ——"

"When is it?"

"To-morrow, sir, at the Victoria. Max has to be in Paris on Thursday."

The great man gave Mr. Sabbine a droll frown.

"The Victoria! But why? My dear Sabbine, the Victoria is so — so ——"

"Exclusive, sir."

"Those people distress me. At the Victoria I always feel covered with gold lace. But not a word."

Mr. Sabbine understood.

"The concert will be a private affair, sir. The audience will consist of three people. I am taking the ballroom because its sound effects are good. Max will play what you please."

"Would he give me some Chopin?"

"You have only to express a wish, sir."

"Splendid. What time, Sabbine?"

"Shall we say five o'clock, sir. Some tea in my suite — first. Max will give us an hour."

"All to ourselves?"

"Yes? all to ourselves."

"What a privilege!"

So Mr. Sabbine returned to the Hotel Victoria, and arranged with Monsieur Muller, the manager, for the hotel ballroom to be reserved from five o'clock till six-thirty on the afternoon of

Wednesday. He said — "I think it would be as well, Mr. Muller, for you to keep the doors locked till five. Then — if you will place one of the porters on duty to see that no one without a card of invitation — intrudes. I hope you understand me?"

Monsieur Muller understood.

"It shall be arranged, sir. Will there be many people? I should wish to know the number of chairs."

"Just three, Mr. Muller."

"Three!"

"That number, exactly. I suggest arm-chairs. I am arranging to have a piano sent in."

The Swiss put his heels together and bowed.

"Always at your service, Mr. Sabbine."

But Mr. Sabbine, in staging his effect, perfected his atmosphere. He had a notice posted in the hall:

> Mr. Max Spindler will give a piano recital in the hotel on the afternoon of Wednesday at five o'clock. Admission by ticket of invitation.

He bribed the head-porter and the *maître d'hôtel*, and gave them special instructions. The concert became gossip. It floated from table to table during dinner and lunch. Apparently it was to be a feeless affair — and exceptional.

Mrs. Horrocks thought of two or three acquaintances against whom she could wipe off an obligation. She called up the *maître d'hôtel*.

"Oh, Gustave, about this concert? Who is issuing the invitations?"

Gustave was bland and innocent.

"I do not know, madame. You had better apply to the head-porter."

Mrs. Horrocks attacked the head-porter, who, equally and innocently ignorant, referred her to the hotel bureau. In the bureau they knew nothing, or nothing that was of any use to Mrs. Horrocks.

She pulled out Monsieur Muller.

"About this concert."

"Yes, madame."

"I want tickets."

"It is by invitation, madame."

"Yes, yes; but who is issuing the invitations?"

Monsieur Muller shrugged politely.

"It is a private affair. Doubtless madame will receive an invitation. I can say no more."

Mrs. Horrocks felt opposition in the air, and inevitably she felt more and more determined to have her chair. With two or three friends she went down to the ballroom at a quarter to five, and found the glass doors locked, and a card with "Private," affixed to them. The ballroom was empty.

She shook the doors.

"How impertinent! The management cannot exclude hotel residents. I shall go and see Muller."

But Monsieur Muller had removed himself out of danger, and when Mrs. Horrocks and her party returned to the glass doors she found them still locked, and Gaston, the head-porter, on guard.

"About this concert ——"

"Yes, madame?"

"I wish to know ——"

Gaston was very polite.

"It is a private concert, madame. Only those ——"

Mrs. Horrocks clicked her tongue, and peered through the glass doors.

"But — what's this? Only three chairs!"

"Yes, madame. It is a very select concert."

The Hotel Victoria was rather like a farmyard quickly infected by feathered agitation. There was nothing to get excited about, but that was just what the Hotel Victoria did get excited about. Mrs. Horrocks carried her grievance into the lounge where a great number of people were having tea, and selecting Colonel Blenkinsop, she addressed him publicly.

"I think it is a perfect scandal. Muller has locked us out of our ballroom because someone is giving a piano recital."

Colonel Blenkinsop wiped his moustache.

"I thought it was a concert."

"There are just three chairs. Perfectly disgraceful. If this German

had been playing for charity, one would have said nothing. I shall complain to Muller. I think we ought to insist on being allowed to use that room."

She gathered a party together and advanced once more upon Gaston and the glass doors of the ballroom. They heard the sound of a piano being played. Max Spindler had begun, for Mr. Sabbine's party had gained the ballroom without passing through the lounge.

Mrs. Horrocks issued an order.

"Gaston, you will unlock that door."

"It is not permitted, madame."

"I insist!"

"Madame had better look."

He stood aside, and Mrs. Horrocks and her supporters first saw a row of chairs at the far end of the ballroom, and on the chairs were seated a number of the hotel waiters, the valets, the chambermaids and some of the kitchen staff. A democratic affair! But not wholly so, for when Mrs. Horrocks turned her attention to the three arm-chairs that were placed in an alcove on the right of the pianist she saw Mr. Sabbine and the pianist's wife, and a certain great gentleman.

Mrs. Horrocks' lips moved, but no sound came from them. It was Colonel Blenkinsop who supplied the words.

"By George, the Duke! What the devil is he doin' sittin' with that fellah?"

Gaston, who was listening, dared to answer the question.

"It is a very select party, monsieur. Mr. Sabbine is a very great authority on art and music. He is intimate with His Highness."

Colonel Blenkinsop made a sort of snarling noise in his throat.

"These Jews are the limit! What about a game before dinner?"

The amateur door-crashers returned to the lounge, where there was much conversation, a sibilant hissing, broken occasionally by shriller exclamations. Even the card-tables were conversational. A catastrophic thing happened. Mrs. Horrocks revoked. She was trying to explain away the catastrophe when somebody said: "Ssh!" and the lounge of the Hotel Victoria rose from its chairs. The Duke was passing through. He was walking with Mr. Sabbine, and he held Mr. Sabbine by the arm, and while acknowledging the salutes of the Hotel Victoria his shy and pleasant smile pro-

tested. "Oh, do, please, sit down. This sort of thing is not necessary. It is not a public occasion." He stood talking to Mr. Sabbine in the vestibule, and the silent lounge listened.

"Yes — I know no pianist who has what I should call the mystic touch — as Max has it. That was a prophetic act of yours, Sabbine. Oh, yes, kindness. You collect more than pictures. You will come and dine with me to-morrow night?"

"It will be a great pleasure, sir."

The Duke was helped on with his coat, and handed his scarf and hat. The doors were held open for him, and as he went out the lounge of the Hotel Victoria had a view of Mr. Sabbine's fat back paying homage to a great gentleman.

Colonel Blenkinsop picked up the cards that had been left lying on the table.

He said:

"Well — I'm demned!"

The Immortals

THE WHITE STEAMER LAY MOTIONLESS FOR A MOMENT IN THE broken blue of the sea. She had dropped a boat like a white shell that dipped and rolled in the swell beside her.

Two men were scrambling about the boat, unhitching the falls and poling off from the ship's side. A third man lay on a mattress in the stern sheets — one man whose face looked all red and mottled, and who sucked his lips in and out as he breathed. He wore nothing but a white shirt and a pair of dark coloured trousers; his feet were bare.

The two men got the oars out and began to pull, the blades of the oars cutting white into the green-blue water under the ship's side. Rows of faces looked down at them — silent, solemn faces. Something dramatic was happening, and happening quietly as things happen with the English in war or at sea. A woman began to cheer and to wave her handkerchief, and the cheer ran along those rows of solemn, staring masks.

"That's what I call courage! Oh, good luck, good luck!" The woman had tears in her eyes.

"Damned plucky!"

An officer stood on the rail and waved his cap.

"Cheerio! The doc. is weeping because he can't come with you. We'll be quarantined — but we'll send someone back."

The rowers looked up and smiled.

"Cheerio!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Cumberledge. Bollard, I'm proud of you."

Bollard spat into the sea.

"Let's get out of the limelight, Mister," he said, loving it all the same.

They pulled clear of the steamer, and saw the white chasm at her stern as the screws began to revolve. She glided away, a white shape between the blue of the sky and the angrier blue of the sea.

Obeying some common impulse the two men rested on their oars and stared at her, Bollard with his flattened head and projecting jaw, Cumberledge long and lean, with breed in every line of him. Then they looked at the man lying on the mattress. He was conscious of nothing; his dusky face was a grotesque attachment to his heavy, breathless chest.

Bollard spat again into the sea.

"Come on," he said.

They resumed their rowing — staring over the boat's stern at the white hull of the steamer that seemed to be sinking more deeply into the blue of the sea. Neither of them spoke; they pulled in silence towards the purple outline of the rocky island which was to be a sort of lazar house, refuge and home. The wind came with an increasing whip out of the clear sky; white horses were showing, and sometimes the top of a wave slapped heavily against the boat's stern.

Bollard turned to look over his shoulder.

"How fur's that durned island?"

Cumberledge stopped rowing and turned his head, and the boat began to swing across the seas.

"Look out, Mister — keep on pulling."

"Sorry, Bollard. It looks as though we had another mile or so yet."

"That ain't worrying me. It's the getting ashore — with that thing."

"There's a strip of sand. Mr. Carter made sure of that — through his glasses."

"Funny, ain't it!" and Bollard nodded his head at the sick man on the mattress; "suppose he'll be a stiff in a day or two."

"Not much doubt about it, I'm afraid. It is one of the deadliest things on earth."

Bollard meditated — his blue jerseyed back swinging steadily.

"Now, if we'd been dagos," he said presently, "we should have dropped the feller into the sea — two days before he was due for heaven. But being British ——"

"Just so," said Cumberledge; "we don't do that sort of thing."

There was another length of silent rowing before Bollard turned his head.

"Say — Mister?"

"Yes?"

"D'you believe in that squirt of stuff the doc. gave us both?"

"A bit."

"Durned if I do."

The top of a wave spilled itself over the stern of the boat. The wind had freshened suddenly as though a big door had been opened in that hard blue sky, and Bollard gave an anxious cock of the chin.

"The sooner we get ashore the better. Queer sea — this. I've known squalls drop on you — out of nothing — like a bucket of water. Keep her steady. Put yer back into it, Mister."

They rowed hard — and Cumberledge — landsman that he was — noticed a peculiar and abrupt change in the surface of the sea. The troughs between the waves seemed broader and deeper, and the waves themselves had a steeper and more menacing curl. He heard Bollard grunt expressively.

"Shallow water. There must be a durned reef round the b—— island. Look out, Mister, or we'll be swamped."

"Can you swim, Bollard?"

"Not a yard."

Suddenly the boat jarred under them — swung round broadside to the seas — heeled over and filled. A wave caught her and rolled her right over.

Cumberledge lay panting on a flat rock just beyond the suck of the sea. His last three minutes had been spent in a chaotic struggle among the breakers that rumbled and splashed on a broken edged headland that jutted into the sea. The end of his long swim had found him fighting to make the strip of sand — but the set of the sea had carried him round the headland to the rocks.

He lay there, conscious only of exhaustion and a most damnable pain in his left leg. In his scramble up the rocks he had caught his left foot in a deep crevice, and the next wave had knocked him over, and the bones had given just above the ankle. His clothes were torn; his body felt one great bruise, and he had swallowed a lot of salt water.

For quite a long while he lay there in a semi-dazed state, with

the sunlight beating on him, and the wind blowing flakes of spray over his body.

Presently he raised his head. The man in him revived. He began to work his way up the slope of the headland — dragging his left foot and cursing it. He crawled beyond the reach of the spray, and gained a little hollow on the top low headland; he was in the sun here and out of the wind, and he could see along the curve of towing sand strung between his headland and the next. But the climb and the pain had exhausted him. His head went down again.

He felt shocked, vastly discouraged, ready almost to weep. What an ending to a day of stiff-lipped courage! Poor Bollard dead — and the dying man soused in the sea! He had had no glimpse of Bollard since the overturning of the boat — though he had swum round and round for a while, looking for him, and he guessed that the sailor had been stunned and had sunk in the deep water beyond the reef. And what a prospect for himself, marooned with a broken leg on an island that he believed to be deserted, foodless, waterless, without shelter!

Everything had been lost with the boat. What a futile sacrifice! They might just as well have dropped that moribund mass of infection over the ship's side into the sea.

Again he raised his head and his manhood stiffened itself. Sunset had come, and behind the sky was a sheet of orange above the deep sombreness of the sea. He blinked, closed his eyes, opened them again, and raised an astonished head above the ledge of rock. He stared. Then he closed his eyes, and kept them closed for half a minute. But when he opened them again, the thing was still there; it had come nearer.

Cumberledge saw two figures in the sands. One figure lay half on the sand and half in the wash of the sea — a figure in a white shirt and dark breeches, and most obviously dead. The other was a thing of life — amazing, incredible — the figure of a girl running wild upon the sands. Cumberledge saw her as a vivid and brilliant creature; a little distant figure that glowed and raced at the edge of the sea.

She came nearer. It was obvious to Cumberledge that she had not seen the dead body lying on the shore, for a ridge of black rock gutted up just beyond it. He was absorbed in watching the girl,

and as she came nearer, sometimes running with arms spread, sometimes taking a few quick steps that were like the steps of a dance, he was fascinated by her strangeness. She looked like a girl of three thousand years ago, some dark-haired child of Minoan Crete.

Her shoulders and arms were bare. Her bodice was red, her skirt an emerald green. She had a green fillet about her hair, great gold earrings, and a massive, barbaric chain of red beads dangling from her neck. And she wore sandals made of some stuff that glittered in the sunlight.

Cumberledge closed his eyes.

"It can't be true," he said to himself; "I must have had a knock on the head."

He re-opened his eyes and saw her close to the wall of black rock. She gave a little run, and rising like a bird, stood poised upon a flat boulder. For a moment she remained utterly still, save for the flutter of her green skirt. She had seen the body lying on the sands.

It was impossible for Cumberledge even to suspect that though she appeared most strange to him, the dead man appeared to her far more strange and impossible. He saw her leap down from the rock, run quickly towards the body and then stop. Her pose as of terror, of astonishment, of immense wonder. He saw her move forward step by step, shirkingly, one arm rigid — the four fingers spread — her other hand at her throat. She was close to the dead man's head and looking down at him. Every part of her seemed to quail.

A vivid phrase came into his head.

"Life discovers Death!"

A moment later he had raised his head and was shouting to her.

"Keep away — keep away."

She did not hear him, for the noise of the sea drowned his voice; nor need he have feared that she would touch the body of the man who had died of pneumonic plague, for she turned and fled with arms spread like the white wings of a bird.

Cumberledge felt dashed. He had a personal interest in life, and a broken leg that called for sympathy; night was coming on and he had no wish to spend it lying in the wind on the cold face of

a rock. He hollowed his hands about his mouth and hailed her again. He saw her pause — only to realize that it was not his shout that had slowed her sandalled feet.

A second figure had appeared, the figure of a man. He had come over the further headland, and as the evening sunlight played upon him he looked like a tiny figure of gold. Cumberledge saw the girl run towards him and cling to him like a frightened child.

Then she pointed — and drew him by the hand — but for a minute or more they remained there, and even their gestures seemed strange. They were freer, more dramatic, more human than the gestures of the moderns and made Cumberledge think of two figures in a Greek tragedy. He forgot his broken leg in watching them, and their slow advance along the sands. The girl was clasping the man's right arm — while he walked like a troubled Zeus treading the stately earth, a Zeus whom some Promethean treachery had angered. His hair and beard were a tawny gold; his loose cloak and tunic were of the same colour, and he wore sandals like the girl.

"I suppose I — do — see them?" thought Cumberledge, feeling his head.

He turned his eyes toward the body of Steel Maitland.

"That's real. And the girl saw it. They must be real."

When he looked again they were close to the black ridge of rock that screened the body. The man climbed it and went on, but the girl remained poised upon a rock — her arms folded over her bosom.

Cumberledge got on his knees, waved, and shouted:

"Keep away from that body."

Again the noise of the great sea drowned his voice; but the girl saw his waving arm and his head and shoulders outlined against the yellow sky. She gave a cry. The man in gold turned and saw her pointing hand. For a moment he stood at gaze, and then walked slowly forward towards the headland. The girl followed him. He suffered her to come with him as far as the rocks — but there he motioned her back.

"Stay here, Ariadne."

Cumberledge heard the words, and thrilled. The man had spoken in classic Greek.

His head appeared above the top of the rocks, a fine head,

strangely young yet venerable, with sea-blue eyes that were clouded and angry, and for a moment these two men looked at each other with curiosity and mistrust.

"I should not come too close, sir," said Cumberledge in English.

He was surprised when the man replied in English that was as English as his own.

"What are you doing here? No one is allowed to land on this island."

His solemnity was epic. He looked like a god questioning a slave. His yellow, Zeus-like head seemed to have passed through life without any sound of laughter. It was Cumberledge who laughed. He could not help seeing the man as a clerified and superhuman squire asking some river party how they dared to land on his island.

And then he was ashamed of his laughter. There was something in the man's eyes that sobered him.

"I beg your pardon. Our boat was upset, and one of the men with me drowned. We did not know whether there was anyone on this island. Didn't you see our steamer?"

The man regarded him steadily, and then looked out to sea.

"There is no steamer."

"No — she dropped us. By the way — does the girl understand English?"

The man nodded.

"Well — I think you had better send her away. If she is your daughter ——"

"Ariadne ——!"

Her immense seriousness, her dark-eyed wonder, changed to a sudden smile. She turned quickly and disappeared. They heard her sandals on the rocks — and when Cumberledge saw her again she was walking slowly along the sands. Once or twice she turned and looked back.

"She is more obedient than I was," said Cumberledge.

The man's blue eyes flared.

"Now! Have you any excuses — anything to plead?"

Cumberledge looked at him in astonishment. If ever he had dreamed of an angry and outraged god ——!"

"I don't understand you ——"

"I am going to throw you back into the sea."

For the moment, Cumberledge thought that the man was mad, and yet his face was not the face of a madman. It betrayed — rather — a calm wrath, a vast resentment against the mischance that had thrown a dead man and a live man upon this island. His eyes were lucid and steady. He meant what he said.

"That's very hospitable of you!"

Cumberledge gave a cracked smile, and turned to ease his broken leg.

"But — before you throw me back into the sea — and by the way — I have got a broken leg — may I explain how and why I happened to land on your island?"

The man sat down on a flat rock.

"Be quick," he said.

"Thank you. My name is Cumberledge; I was a passenger on the *Otranto*, and bound for England. Three or four days ago my cabin companion fell sick; it turned out to be penumonic plague. The news leaked through the ship and there was something like a panic. Well, to be brief — another man and myself volunteered to take the fellow off the ship — land on one of these islands, and run an isolation hospital for one. We might develop the disease; we had to chance that — and we chanced it. As it happened — our boat upset on that reef — the sailor with me was drowned; so was our patient. That's him — there."

He nodded towards the body on the darkening sands. The sky had lost its warm flush and the sea had changed to amethyst. The man turned his head and looked at the dead man who had been washed ashore — and the wind seemed to blow more coldly.

"So, you will observe, sir, that I did not land on your island for a picnic. Also, I would suggest that I am an infected person, and that in throwing me into the sea, you might inbreathe the infection."

He ended with a touch of fierceness, sarcasm. The man sat very still on his rock, his yellow hair and beard turning to a ghostly silver. Presently, he spoke.

"Is that a threat?"

"I should call it a warning."

They eyed each other in the dusk and, somehow, Cumberledge felt that the other man had softened, that his inexplicable anger

had entered a shadow of perplexity.

"By the way — it would interest me to know what sin I have committed in being washed ashore on this island?"

The man seemed to reflect.

"The sin of bringing death where no death is."

"You mean ——?"

"Man," and his voice had a fierce solemnity, "you have blundered in upon a great experiment. That dead thing down there has spoilt the work of twenty years."

Cumberledge's pale face strained out of the dusk.

"Do you mean to say that nothing has ever died on this island?"

"Not since I have been here."

"And your daughter ——?"

"She does not know there is such a thing as death. I have brought her up to believe that we go on living and living for a thousand years, and that then — the Great Messenger comes for us. I wanted to see whether the body would grow old, when the soul did not know that old age, as we know it, and death, existed."

"But, good heavens, man," said Cumberledge, "what about heredity, the habit of millions of years?"

"I am a mystic. The body is for the soul, not the soul for the body."

He looked over the darkening sea, and then he turned to Cumberledge.

"How old do you think I am?"

"You look forty-five."

"I am seventy, and my daughter is thirty."

"She looks eighteen."

"Exactly. I expect to live another thirty years, and I expected the girl to look just as she is now, thirty years hence. But you, and that body ——"

"Look here," said Cumberledge a little testily; "do you mean to tell me that nothing has died here, that she has never seen a dead bird or a dead animal?"

"There are no birds and no animals on the island."

"Fish, then?"

"I have never seen a dead fish."

"And there are just you two?"

"I have three servants."

"And how would you explain, then, to your daughter, supposing——?"

"She believes that they are nearly a thousand years old."

"And they pretend——?"

"Yes. There are reasons."

"But how do you live?"

"On fruits and vegetables. Twice a year a ship calls, and we land stores in our boat, but the sailors never come ashore. Of course, I have had to pay, and pay heavily."

It grew darker, and they could no longer see the body on the sands.

"It seems to me," said Cumberledge, "that the solution of the difficulty is very simple, I mean, the explaining of that dead body. He was a thousand years old, and the Great Messenger had come for his soul."

The man made a movement of the head.

"Then — there is me."

"Yes, there is you."

They looked at each other steadily in the dusk, this Englishman and this neo-Greek who once had been an Englishman. There was a sense of struggle and of perplexity; the present became penetrated by the past.

"Let us consider," said Cumberledge, "the idea of your pitching me back into the sea. The trouble is that the girl has seen me — very much alive."

The man sat with bowed head.

"Wait," he said; "be patient — a moment. Something is speaking inside me——!"

He stood up; he seemed strangely agitated. Then, he clambered down the rocks and began to walk up and down on the sand. He was visible to Cumberledge as a dim, moving shape, a ghost, troubled, distracted. The stars were shining; the wind seemed to blow less keenly.

Presently, he came climbing back to where Cumberledge lay.

"Your father was at Trinity?"

"Yes."

"He rowed in the Cambridge boat?"

"That's true."

"So did I."

There was a pause, tense with significance.

"My name is Ringwood," said the man; "you may have heard it."

Cumberledge had heard it.

"Not the Ringwood, Lord Test——?"

"Yes, twenty years ago—I was that."

Cumberledge sat silent. Young man that he was that name was known to him, a name that had drawn to itself a little world of mystery and tragic strangeness. He had heard old gossips at the "clubs" speak of the "Ringwood affair," and of the tales that were told of its vague aftermath. No one had ended the tale in the same way. Ringwood was alive and he was dead; he had disappeared in Central Africa; he had been last heard of in Thibet; he had died of drink in Paris. Some men still remembered him as the scholar, the traveller, the collector of old books and of precious stones, the great gentleman, the maker of gardens, and the planter of trees.

"I see," said Cumberledge in a hushed voice; "I see."

Ringwood was standing and looking down at him.

"The easiest way would be for me to take you on my back," he said.

Cumberledge gave a jerk of the chin.

"What! You mean——?"

"I have a garden house on the edge of my wood of cypresses and pines. You could be isolated there; no one else need come near you."

There was a short, tense silence. Then Cumberledge spoke.

"It can't be done," he said.

"It must be done," said the other.

He came close, but Cumberledge put up a hand.

"No, stand off. If you could rig up a shelter or something in the sands, and bring food and water, and lash up this leg of mine, I could manage."

A calm but stubborn voice answered him out of the darkness.

"Is that our tradition? No. You were ready to risk your life for the sake of a lot of strangers. What do you think your father would have done in my place? The moon will be up soon."

"But, look here, sir, what about the others, your daughter?"

"That will be arranged. The servants will not come too near to the garden house. They will leave us food."

Cumberledge half rose on one knee.

"Us! You are not going to——?"

"That is just what I am going to do."

"But your theory — the living-for-ever idea——?"

"Life is stronger than theories, Cumberledge, so is tradition, sometimes. I realized that — an hour ago when I was down there on the sands."

The sun shone full on the garden house, but Cumberledge lay in the shade. He looked out between pillars of white stone at the house standing in the valley below, surrounded by its gardens, and for its background the blue of the sea. It was not such a house as northern Europe knows, but a thing of the old Ægean life, and Cumberledge could see its white porticoes and colonnades shining behind the cypresses and pines. A tiny stream coming down from the hills was caught in great cisterns of white marble. Everywhere the water had been led into little murmuring channels among the orange groves, and between the vines Cumberledge could hear nothing but the trickle of the water, and the sighing of the wind in the cypresses and pines. A life that was thousands of years old, a life that seemed capable of going on for ever.

And yet this air of permanency was an illusion, and Cumberledge knew it to be an illusion. He lay and wondered what Ringwood thought — the Zeus of this little island who had had rugs spread under the shade of a pine, and who sat and slept there, and talked. Two days had gone by, and it seemed to Cumberledge that Ringwood had grown suddenly and perceptibly older, that he had withered slightly in a night. Was it possible that Time, his seventy years, had suddenly overtaken him?

And the girl?

Daily, she came as far as the low stone wall that divided the wood and the wilderness from the garden. There was a stone seat here under the shade of the tree, and she would sit there and watch the two men as though she was trying to understand something, to fathom their secret. Cumberledge felt that she had begun

to realize that there was a secret. He conceived an immense pity for her, and something more than pity. This father of hers had dreamed of giving her a sort of perennial youth, a beautiful, cold immaturity. Was such a youth desirable? Had he not withheld from her the real food of the immortals, love, pain, sacrifice?

Sometimes she sang to them, touching the strings of her zither; sometimes she talked; for the seat was less than thirty paces away, and in that serene stillness the voice carried far. Cumberledge understood that she had been forbidden to come nearer, and that she had accepted Ringwood's orders as she had accepted life upon the island. Yet she, too, had changed. Her eyes had began to question things. There were moments when they betrayed resentment, impatience; the impatience of a child who is learning to ask questions, the resentment of the woman who demands that they shall be answered.

Very often the eyes of these two met with questioning significance across that space of thyme and lavender.

"Oh, stranger, what art thou?"

"Ariadne, I am life and death."

The servants brought food, wine and water, and left them halfway between the garden house and the garden. They were quiet, softly-moving, sombre creatures dressed in some coarse white material, and looking like old Cistercian monks. Cumberledge never heard them speak. Their eyes regarded Ringwood as though he were no common man, but a clean god and a master.

Two more days slipped by, and Cumberledge had listened to all the mystical philosophy that had filled the life of this strange exile. On the fifth day he noticed a change in Ringwood's voice, it seemed flatter and less vital, less full of confidence. He appeared restless; his blue eyes had lost their tranquillity. In the cool of the evening he disappeared, and darkness was falling before he returned, walking slowly and with a suggestion of effort.

Cumberledge heard him cough. That most prosaic of sounds was the opening note of the tragedy.

He sat down a few yards from the door of the garden house, and Cumberledge could hear him breathing, and it was the breathing of physical distress.

"Ringwood," he said, "what is wrong?"

The doomed man remained very still.

"It has come," he answered, "and it has come suddenly. I have been deciding what I ought to do."

"Good God!" said Cumberledge, sitting up, "forgive me."

Ringwood stretched out an expressive hand.

"It is fate — my message. Listen to what I have to say. Let us look at things calmly. This disease kills and kills quickly. Yet — I should be lying there on those rugs, a thing sodden with fever, delirious, unconscious. What would happen? The child would come to me. Nothing, no persuasion would be able to keep her away. She would catch the disease and die."

He spoke very calmly yet with tragic tenderness.

"That must not happen. You, you, when the thing has passed over, will have to tell her ——"

"Man, what do you mean?"

"You will have to tell her the truth, for I shall not be here."

And then, he stretched out his hands eloquently, pleadingly, with infinite meaning.

"Cumberledge, I have loved this child, and perhaps too well. Perhaps, I have been wrong; perhaps I have made her life too much that of a beautiful figure in a case of glass. I appeal to you, the son of my old friend. She will not lack anything of the grosser things of life, but you can give her what I can no longer give."

He bowed his head, and seemed to struggle for breath.

"Love," he said — and lost his voice in a spasm of coughing — "the most sacred of all things, the immortal fire."

He covered his head with his arms and stood up.

"Promise ——"

"I promise. But, Ringwood ——"

"The truth, tell her ——"

"I will try. But, man, what is in your mind ——?"

"*Explicit*," said Ringwood suddenly, and passed into the darkness out of Cumberledge's view.

Cumberledge sat and trembled. He could hear a rustling sound as though a man were groping for something among the bushes.

"Ringwood," he called. "Ringwood, where are you ——?"

The shadowy figure reappeared; it had something dark, like a loose bundle on its shoulder.

"I shall burn these," it said, "down by the shore — the rugs and blankets. Man — remember."

He drew back and disappeared; but Cumberledge called after him in a voice of tragedy:

"Ringwood, come back. Where are you going?"

There was no answer. Cumberledge sat and listened, overwhelmed by a sense of his own helplessness. He knew Ringwood had gone to the sea.

It was the most perfect dawn that Cumberledge ever remembered, an enchanted, Homeric dawn of purple and gold. The motionless cypresses stood as black spires against the changing sapphire of the sea. There was no wind, no movement; nothing but a solemn ecstasy of silence, a beautiful sadness in the eyes of the day's joy.

And Cumberland waited. He had lain awake half the night, had watched the stars grow pale and night snatching her dark robe from off the sea. He was wondering what he would say to Ariadne, how he would tell her, what she would do.

Presently he saw one of the servants come up from the garden with the morning's meal in two Samian bowls. Cumberledge called to him.

"Andrew ——"

The man set the bowls down on a patch of grass, and stood staring. He saw that the rugs had gone, and that his master was not there.

"Andrew, did your master tell you why none of you were to come near us?"

"No, sir."

"It was because I had come from a ship in which there had been a deadly disease. He wished no one else to face the danger of taking it. The disease has passed me over; but last night your master sickened."

The man looked scared.

"He has taken his bed away, sir."

Cumberledge was leaning forward, his face tense and lined.

"Andrew, I believe that your master has drowned himself; he did it so that your mistress shall be safe. Go, all three of you, and

search the island; make sure. But say nothing to her."

The man's face was like a tragic mask.

"That was like him," he said; "he was more of a god than a man."

An hour passed, and Cumberledge lay back and waited, his eyes fixed on the two Samian bowls, one of which held the mortal food that Ringwood would taste no more. He had drunk the wine of self-sacrifice; he was with the immortals; the Samian bowl was for the living, not for the dead.

Presently Cumberledge heard a voice, the voice of a girl singing as she came up through the garden.

"Dear God!" he thought, "and I must tell her that it was I who brought death to this island!"

As she climbed the steps he saw her dark beauty rise against the green of the cypresses and the blue of the sea. She stood there, looking across the white portico of the garden house, her hands clasped behind her head, a Greek girl, a woman, a child.

Cumberledge called to her, softly.

"Ariadne."

She dropped her hands, smiled and came across to him through the knee-deep lavender and thyme, and when she saw the two Samian bowls with the food in them untouched she paused, surprised.

"You have had no food, neither you nor my father."

He saw her glance pass to the place where Ringwood's bed had been.

"The bed has gone!"

Cumberledge was sitting up, watching her between the stone pillars.

"Ariadne," he said, "I have something to say to you. Your father left a message for you."

Her eyes were fixed on him, they seemed to grow larger, to fill themselves with darkness. Her body lost its flowing youthfulness and grew rigid.

"I do not understand."

"The Great Messenger ——" he said.

For one moment she remained very still, then she flung herself

down on the scented maquis. Her arms were folded over her head, her face buried in the grey foliage; she did not move or utter a sound, but lay there like a mourner in a temple stretched at the feet of her god. And into the silence came the figure of the man Andrew. He looked at Cumberledge and made a sign, and Cumberledge understood.

The man vanished, but Ariadne did not move. Cumberledge sat and watched her, wondering whether it was time to speak. Yet, while he was hesitating, she raised herself a little; he could see her dark hair but not her face.

"He did not say good-bye to me," she said.

The seal of a perplexed silence fell from the man's lips.

"Ariadne, have you never heard of death?"

Her sombre eyes lifted to his.

"Death! What is death?"

"The Great Messenger. He called your father, and your father heard him. Death comes for us all. Listen, and I will tell you."

She lay curled up like a wounded thing, listening, half-hidden in the scented bushes. Cumberledge spoke very simply, just as he would have spoken to a child. He told her the truth — that most difficult of all things to tell.

"It was I who brought death here — thinking to save other lives. Your father saved me, and when the Great Messenger came for him he went like the great man that he was. He did not stay to say good-bye to you, for if he had stayed death might have taken you also. He did not wish you to die."

She stood up; she turned away and went slowly down towards the garden, her arms hanging limply. She disappeared down the steps and was lost in a grove of cypresses, but presently Cumberledge heard her voice utter one wailing bitter cry. Then there was silence, a silence that hurt his heart.

"How she must hate me!" he thought.

His own helplessness exasperated him. His glance lighted again on the two Samian bowls standing on the patch of grass in the morning sunlight. He remembered that he had not eaten, and realized that his fast could not last for ever.

"God helps those . . ." he thought, and sat considering his

splinted leg and how best he could crawl to fetch his food. He was in the very act of moving himself from the mattress that was laid upon the floor when he saw Ariadne reascending the steps that led from the garden. She came forward, bent down, picked up one of the Samian bowls and carried it towards the portico.

The Harmless Satyr

I SAW HIM FIRST IN THE KURSAAL AT CLAREUX.

He arrived at the moment when Herr Muller, the first violin and director of the orchestra, had paused to give his head a toss before attacking Wienawski's sonata. The place was crowded. Very tall and very pale, and wearing a black plush hat that was rather too small for him, he searched shyly for a vacant chair. In one hand he clutched a pair of black kid gloves; the other held a white paper bag that might have contained half a dozen very fragile eggs. He was both deprecating and dignified. Obviously he did not desire to disturb either the orchestra or the audience, but he did wish to get seated and to submerge himself in the crowd.

The head waitress insinuated herself between the tables. She managed to attract his attention. She was a very capable young woman with a nose and a forehead and a chin that shone as though she polished them with one of those velvet pads that are used for adding gloss to a glacé shoe.

"You will find a chair here, monsieur."

He appeared immensely relieved. He gave her a little stiff bow, and a gentle smile. She disposed of him in a chair by one of the pillars. He placed his gloves and the paper bag on a table, removed his black plush hat, and held it to his chest for a moment before tucking it away under the table. His pallor was remarkable; it was a kind of gentle, dim greyness as though he had lived for years in a sort of twilight world.

Herr Muller was tossing his head and acknowledging the applause when Major Jeremy caught my eye.

"See that fellow?"

"The gentleman with the paper bag?"

"That's it. Anything strike you?"

Quite a number of things had struck me. At five-and-fifty one

is either very dead or very alive. Being a woman — and quite undomesticated — I continued to find the world absurdly interesting. Moreover, I had just come from Rome, and my Rome is always the Rome of the ancients. I go back to the marble nymphs and fauns, the naked girls and gods and satyrs. They refresh one. They belong to the years when life was very much younger. And in the cloisters of the Baths of Diocletian I had been amused and intrigued by a particular piece of statuary.

"It's quite absurd," I said.

Major Jeremy cocked an eye at me from under a bushy white eyebrow.

"German, or Austrian?"

"Oh, that's too modern and superfluous. A living satyr."

He tapped a cigarette on the table.

"That's it! I was groping. Pan in a plush hat."

"But a very gentle Pan."

Why the ancients should have assigned that particular type of face to Pan and his creatures I do not know. Its expression may be brutal and sensual, but it can also express gentleness and humour and a kind of naïve sympathy with birds and beasts. Yet it seemed to me that the man disturbed the very conventional people who were seated near him, just as the odour of a white man is unpleasing to a negro or an Arab. I saw a woman edge her chair away. And I think he must have been aware of the curious repugnance he inspired, that he was familiar with it, and pained by it, and unable to understand it. It explained both his dignity and his air of gentle and sad shyness. He was the cause of an unhappy physical flinching among his fellows, just because puckish Nature had endowed him with a particular cast of countenance.

Even old Jeremy was susceptible to it.

"Sinister looking beggar."

I did not agree with him.

"It's a mask," I said. "Try and look a bit deeper."

"I don't know that I want to."

Even the much polished head waitress appeared moved to treat the man with severity. He had ordered a cup of chocolate. The white paper bag reposed upon the table, and the woman objected to the bag and its probable contents. There happened to be a lull

in the conversation, and I heard what passed.

"Monsieur will excuse me, but visitors are not permitted to bring food with them."

His pale eyelashes flickered.

"It is not for myself, madame. Biscuits — biscuits for the birds."

He went so far as to open the bag and show her the contents, and she gazed down at it and at him a little scornfully. She was a full-blooded young woman, and this pale creature with his bag of biscuits and his shy and wayward eyes must have seemed to her both uninteresting and futile.

I glanced at old Jeremy. He was a very quick person who resented unnecessary questions.

"A bag of biscuits for the little birds! A St. Francis disguised as Pan."

"Why not? A bag of shot is your ideal."

He smiled at me.

"Used to be. I'm not so fond of killing things — as I was."

Life may be little more than a series of glimpses, and I had my glimpses of the man in the black plush hat. He came daily to the Kursaal, but he refrained from introducing his paper bag. No one ever spoke to him, save the waitress who brought him his tea or his chocolate. It was both obvious that he was a lover of music and that he understood it, but it seemed to me that music did not satisfy him. I would catch him looking wistfully at his fellow humans, as though he felt his isolation, and was hungry for human sympathy. So eager did he appear to exchange a few words with someone that I saw him pause and try to talk to the very dry and polite person in a blue coat who sat at the bureau just inside the door.

Obviously, he was a very lonely creature, though he looked no more than forty. His height — he was six feet or more — made him all the more noticeable, and he held himself very straight like a Prussian prisoner refusing to bend. He was very fair. His pale blue eyes looked at the world as though they asked for everything and nothing, and concealed their yearning behind a mute and deprecating mildness.

I christened him the Harmless Satyr.

Once or twice I found him standing by the edge of the lake, a

solitary and very black figure surrounded by seagulls. He was feeding them with broken biscuits from a paper bag, throwing the pieces up in the air, and smiling as the birds swooped to catch them. I felt very much tempted to stop and speak to him, but he appeared so absorbed in feeding the creatures that I left him alone with them. Moreover, the gull is a bird I fail to appreciate. I mislike the coldness of its eye.

Major Jeremy had missed three afternoons at the Kursaal. I supposed that he had had one of his attacks of asthma, and was fuming and wheezing and re-reading the old magazines in the hotel lounge, but on the Saturday he turned up at the Kursaal wearing a new suit.

Does a man ever cease to be susceptible? I believe old Jeremy had three love affairs per year, and bought a new suit whenever the divine occasion had arrived. He looked at me with his brazen blue eyes, just like a guilty and self-pleased boy, and sat down, and beckoned to the waitress.

"You'll tea with me to-day."

I said that I would, provided he would allow me to eat nothing but brown bread and butter.

"You're so Spartan, dear lady. Do you really like it?"

"Of course I do."

He gave the waitress his order as though he were paying her a compliment.

"Oh, by the way, remember that German chap?"

"My Harmless Satyr?"

"I say, that's a good name. The fellow is staying at my hotel."

The coincidence would have lacked either significance or interest had not Jeremy gone on to comment upon the H.S.'s isolation.

"Not a soul will speak to him. If he goes and sits in a corner — he has that corner to himself."

"But why?"

"Well, he's a German — you see, and it isn't so very long since the war."

"But — in Switzerland ——?"

"Clareux is a sort of little England. Ninety per cent. of the 'Grand' is English, the rest French or Belgian. And then — you know — the fellow has a rather queer physiognomy. The English

like things just so."

"I know we do. But a poor lonely creature with the eyes of a lost dog, a man who feeds the birds, and wears a pathetic hat——!"

"Dear lady, it may be the hat——"

"Oh, I know, the heinousness of hats!"

The tea arrived, and when I had poured out Jeremy's cup he gave me one of his droll, kind glances.

"Well — anyway — I spoke to the chap."

"Good for you."

"His name's Halberg — Heinrich Halberg. My German is as formless as a haggis, but he has plenty of English. I thought he was going to kiss me."

"That's an exaggeration."

"Granted. But — do you know — I rather took to the chap. He's got a sort of natural niceness. He doesn't splurge. He has dignity."

A somewhat creamy cake occupied his attention for the moment, and I thought what a pet he was, with his brick-red face, and his air of fierceness, and his very generous heart. He had the old English phlegm.

His blue eyes stared under their white eyebrows.

"That fellow has had a very bad time — dear lady. That's my feeling about him. He gives you the impression of having been bled white. I never thought that a German would offer me a cigar, and that I should take it."

"And the cigar——?"

"Minx!" he said. "Oh — perfect. But — hallo——"

He glanced up and I saw the Harmless Satyr not two yards from our table. He bowed to Jeremy, and he bowed with a kind of grave shyness to me. I saw Jeremy's moustache twitch, a sign that mischief was in the air. He got up and introduced us.

"Herr Halberg — Miss Fraser."

I found myself suggesting that Herr Halberg should take the third chair.

His grey face lit up. The pallor of it was actually suffused with pink. He gave me a second little bow, holding his plush hat to his chest. His pale blue eyes had a kind of Northern innocence.

"You are very kind. I accept."

His English was good, and later I was to learn that his French

was almost as good as his English. He sat down, and he gave me a proof of his sensitive restraint, for the orchestra began to play "Madame Butterfly," and with one courteous little explanatory smile, he sat silent and still, enjoying the music. His very stillness was a thing of breeding. He did not fidget or attempt to be self-consciously appreciative. He just sat there and listened.

With Muller distributing his acknowledging bows Jeremy thought it time to make a remark. For an Englishman he was very patient when an orchestra was attacking.

"That fellow's an artist. Always looks rather ill — though ——"

I saw Herr Halberg press his pale lips together, and I suddenly remembered that Muller had been a prisoner in Russia during the war, and that the conversation might verge upon the painful, so I asked Halberg whether he would take tea or chocolate.

He blushed.

"Oh, no — you must not give me tea. Though I have the honour of your kindness ——"

He made a sign to the waitress, and ordered himself a cup of chocolate, and turning to me began to talk music until he realized that Jeremy knew nothing about music save that he liked it tuneful. His divergence was instant. Were we fond of flowers? And had we seen the crocus fields? Jeremy had the Englishman's passion for flowers, so all was well.

Like many sensitive people I follow my intuitions, and my intuition told me that my Harmless Satyr was the gentlest of creatures. Being old enough to be his mother I could observe and study him without the prejudices of a mother or the merciless severity of a young girl. His Nature God was of the North. He had the Northerner's blue-eyed and dreamy romanticism. Tear an illusion from him and he would instantly possess himself of another. Besides, you cannot deprive a man of music and birds and mountains unless you shut him up in a prison, and even in prison his Northern imagination will find the grey mists and the sea.

But that was what had happened to Halberg. He had been a prisoner, and a Russian prisoner, a white man in a land of red slime. I did not know it then, but he was to tell me about it later, though he did not tell me the whole of it. He told that to Jeremy, as man to man, for Russia was a red rag to Jeremy. "Better at

butchery than soldiering." He said that he did not understand the Russian and did not want to understand him.

But I was to be brought to see my Harmless Satyr in a different situation, and to get my glimpse of the man as God may have seen him. I love poking about in the picturesque back streets of the continental towns, and the old parts of Clareux had to be searched for up steep lanes and along grey passages, and I was exploring what was a mere donkey track on the hillside below Guyon when I chanced upon Halberg in a singular situation.

He was standing outside a little stone cottage, holding his plush hat in one hand and some money in the other. He was being harangued with emphasis by a very square and confident Swiss woman. On the front of the cottage hung a bird's cage, the wire door of which was open.

I effaced myself in a deep doorway.

"It is not a question of money, monsieur," the Swiss woman was saying. "You have interfered with our property——"

I listened. I gathered that there had been a goldfinch in that cage, and that Halberg — deliberately — had opened the door of the cage and let the bird out. Afterwards he had knocked up the woman, told her what he had done, and had offered her the price of the bird.

But she would have none of his money. She protested that the bird had been a great pet, and Halberg put his money away, but still stood with his hat in his hand.

"Madame — I — too — have been a prisoner. Until one has been shut up behind wire — one does not understand. You will forgive me — but I cannot bear now to see a bird in a cage."

"But it was not your bird, monsieur."

"Are the birds and the beasts our slaves, madame?" he asked.

I came out of my doorway. Halberg had produced a fountain pen and an envelope, and was writing down the woman's name and her address.

"I hope you will permit me to make some little recompense, madame. I wish to."

Then he saw me and blushed. He had put on his hat. He raised it to me, and including the Swiss woman in the salute, paused for a moment to hand her his card.

"If you wish to take proceedings, madame ——"

Obviously she did not. You could not be angry with the man, and she shrugged her shoulders and smiled, and Halberg came down the path to join me, still carrying his hat, and looking shy.

"Is it not strange," he said, "that good people who feed wild birds in winter will yet shut up a wild bird in a cage."

I supposed that it was due to our childish egotism, and he adjusted his plush hat, and for a moment looked as fierce as it was possible for him to look.

"Yes, our egotism. I suppose it is egotism — even when I cannot bear to see a bird in a cage, and must let the creature out. Do I do it to please myself? No — I think not — not wholly. I do feel for the bird."

"I'm sure you do. Have you opened many cages in Clareux?"

"Three: A blackbird, a linnet, and a goldfinch. They will not miss this spring."

There was emotion in his voice. He walked beside me, erect, courteous, serious, yet his eyes seemed to be watching the happy flutterings of some liberated bird.

"I agree with you," I said, "but what an inconvenient person you would be in a Zoo. Would you let out the lions and the tigers?"

He answered me with a kind of stark gravity.

"I never go to Zoos. The cages smell. They are unhappy places, very unhappy, and full of children. And children can be so cruel ——"

So it appeared that he wandered about Clareux looking for bird cages that could be opened, though he admitted that his liberating passion did not spend itself upon canaries. Mercifully he excluded the little yellow birds from his endeavours. His gentle, droll smile showed me that he was not one of your brass-bound reformers who cannot let life alone.

"A canary is a canary. Canaries and cages go together."

"Yes — Herr Halberg — there are human canaries who appear to ask for cages, and a sunny window."

I saw that I hurt him. He winced. His pale lips matched his pale eyes. I could only wonder whether I had touched a sore memory — if I had hurt him, or whether he was the sort of man who was always hurting himself. Possibly he had been the possessor of a pet

canary, and it had died.

But the explanation came to me through Jeremy some days later. Men make queer friendships, and yet there was nothing queer in the friendship that appeared to spring up between the red Englishman and the pale German. They were such contrasts, pepper and salt, red wine and white.

I ran into Jeremy in the English library where he was pulling books from the shelves and putting them back again with an air of bored impatience.

"What a lot of stuff! You only get a live book once in a blue moon."

Jeremy's "live books" dealt mostly with the shooting of elephants and tigers, or with descriptions of very greasy and very primitive peoples of a horrible degree of ugliness. He would never allow them their ugliness, and would accuse me of being suburban and prejudiced because I looked at a black man with the eyes of a white woman.

"Here's just the thing for you," I said. "How I explored the Amazon in a Wash Tub."

He grinned and took the book.

"Canoe — to be correct — dear lady. Got ten minutes to spare?"

"Probably."

"Let's go and sit by the lake. I have something to tell you. I suppose I may tell you."

He was strapping up his collection of books, and I smiled over him.

"I suppose you may, if it is not about a third person."

He bushed his eyebrows at me.

"Of course it's about a third person. It always is, isn't it? I don't go in for confessionals."

It was about Halberg. We sat on an iron seat under the drooping gold of a weeping willow, and looked across the blue lake at the mountains of Savoy. Jeremy could sit for an hour and stare at these mountains as though he was considering how each one could be climbed. He had a very serious face this morning, for he was confronting the tragedy of a man's life.

"Suppose I can tell you."

"I suppose that depends——"

"You are the one woman in this place who doesn't reduce life to gossip. Gossip is talking about other people's frailties and troubles — without any decent human feeling for them. Like turning over odds and ends of meat in a butcher's shop. Life's a serious business."

"In this case — would the third person mind?"

"I don't think he would. Not you. Besides the poor beggar is very plucky and big about it."

"A woman?"

"Oh — of course."

"Not inevitable — you know. Well ——?"

Jeremy rested his elbows on his knees.

"Oh — well — quite an unusual sort of tale. But is anything usual when you know one of the characters? Halberg had a young wife — a sort of pretty canary in a cage — I should imagine ——"

I was inwardly startled.

"A canary?"

"That's how I sense it. Well, he went to the war, and was taken prisoner by the Russians, and shut up for three years in a damned wire cage. And presently his wife's letters ceased — and when he got back to Germany — after the war ——"

"The canary's cage was empty?"

Jeremy gave one of his characteristic grunts.

"That's the long and short of it," he said.

So that was how a woman and the war had treated my poor Harmless Satyr, leaving him no doubt with that peculiar and secret feeling of humiliation that such an affair produces in a man. I have Jeremy's word for that. A man loves both his wife and himself, and his self-regard may be interwoven with his love for the woman. Strip out that love from the pattern and you leave the man's pride all shreds and tatters.

"Poor Halberg! With his pale and gentle eyes."

Jeremy grunted.

"Don't be sentimental. The fellow's better off as he is. He's not shut up in a cage."

"No, my dear, but he may be horribly lonely. All men are not predestined bachelors ——"

"You're wrong there, if you are being personal. If my con-

founded pension weren't so paltry——"

I laughed, but Jeremy did not know what I was laughing at. Moreover it was not unkind laughter, though how many "little pretties" he would have collected during his earthly course had his income been adequate, is a question for the people who can calculate probabilities.

But I don't think either of us foresaw the ultimate adventure.

Herr Halberg and I met fairly regularly at the Kursaal and I supposed that he was still wandering round Clareux and its neighbouring villages looking for birds to liberate. It struck me that his Northern eyes were even more dreamy, and that music was even more intimately his. We should not have found out — perhaps — what was happening had not Jeremy been dragged off to dance at the Clareux Palace Hotel by a young thing who had to dance with somebody.

I met him next day. He had an air of mystery. He asked me if I ever went to the Palace dances. They were held twice a week.

"Why should I?"

"It would be worth your while to see the young fools doing that new dance."

"The Charleston?"

"Believe that's it. I call it leg-waggling."

"Why don't you take me?"

"I will — if you like."

Half Europe and a part of America must know the "Palace" at Clareux. It is huge and obvious and expensive and comfortable, as efficient an establishment as that most efficient little country can show. That it lacked "atmosphere" was a matter of no importance. The cuisine, the tennis-courts, the dance floor, and the orchestra were the fundamentals. I don't know why, but the "Palace" at Clareux always made me think of a French cemetery, with its pompous little graves decorated with horrible bead wreaths and crosses, and framed photographs of the departed. Even the garden on the edge of the lake was as artificial as one of the shops where they sell you cheap china and picture-postcards, and little wooden chalets and boxes covered with shells.

Jeremy and I wandered in about nine o'clock. I went to the cloak-room, and he waited for me in the broad gallery between

the lounge and the ballroom. The orchestra was playing dance music, and half a dozen couples were walking busily up and down the polished vastness of the floor. When I rejoined Jeremy I found that he had taken possession of a settee and a table in the lounge.

"I've ordered coffee. Will you have a liqueur?"

"No, just coffee, thank you."

But I was wondering why he had chosen the lounge when there were a dozen vacant chairs in the ballroom, and we had come to watch the young things "leg-waggling." True, I had a view through one of the big doorways, and I could look along one half of the ballroom, but I did not understand why the show should be split in half for me.

He appeared to divine my inward protest.

"You'll understand in a minute or two. I have brought you here to see something else. We don't want to be too obvious."

"Why so secretive?"

"Oh, well; you wait and see."

"Nothing to observe at present?"

"Yes, part of the show. Just look straight ahead and tell me if anything catches your eye."

At the far end of the ballroom, and close to a group of palms and the orchestra's grand piano I saw two people seated in gilded and red velvet chairs. They sat side by side, within a foot of each other, staring straight down the room like a couple of royal supers posed on a stage.

The man was very old. He had a bush of white hair standing up fiercely on his square head; the corners of his hard mouth curved down to form a circle with his prominent chin. His eyes had a peculiar, set, glassy stare; they were both dead and very alive. A couple of sticks were tucked in beside him. He had the biggest hands that I have ever seen, and they rested on his thighs like the paws of some grim old animal.

He looked French, and yet not quite French, whereas the girl who sat beside him was neither white nor brown, but an exquisite, soft blending of the two. She should have worn a wreath of exotic flowers. Her eyes were like the eyes of a gentle animal, large, brown, and a little frightened. She was dressed in some saffron-coloured stuff, with a necklace of magnificent diamonds round her

slim throat. She sat beside that rather terrible old man as though chained to his chair.

I glanced at Jeremy.

"Those two figures?"

He nodded.

"At twenty-five one would have said father and daughter. But — at fifty-five ——"

"That's so."

"Abominable! Who are they?"

Jeremy was lighting a cigar.

"Old chap's French, colonial, Guadeloupe or Martinique or somewhere. Name of Legros. Beastly rich. Yes; that's his wife."

"Mixed blood somewhere?"

"Obviously. Pretty thing. Much too pretty for that old ogre. They tell me he never lets her out of his sight."

"Jeremy," I said, "how do you get hold of all this gossip?"

"It isn't gossip," he retorted. "I picked up the human facts from a fellow at the club who is staying here at the 'Palace.' I was watching 'em the other night when I was dancin' here. They just sit like that. They never seem to speak to each other or to anybody, and nobody speaks to them."

"Your ogre doesn't look very approachable. But the girl ——"

"They tell me that nobody is allowed to speak to her. If anyone tries to — that old curmudgeon growls like a dog with a bone. Well, here we are."

He pointed with his cigar, and I saw Halberg pass along the broad space between the lounge and the ballroom like a man passing across a stage. He was wearing a black overcoat over evening dress. In his left hand he carried his black plush hat, in the other a bouquet of white carnations. It struck me that he had a rapt, visionary look. He disappeared in the direction of the cloakroom, and when he reappeared he was still carrying the carnations. He did not see us. In fact he had the air of seeing nobody. He went and sat down at a little table just inside the ballroom, and I could see the back of his head and three quarters of his thin, flat back. He placed his bouquet carefully on the table.

I glanced inquiringly at Jeremy.

"Is he part of the play?"

And Jeremy nodded.

"He was here the other night. He has that table reserved for him. They tell me that he has been here every night."

"And the carnations?"

"Yes, every night he has a bunch of carnations."

"And presents them to somebody?"

"No, takes them away with him. Can't bring himself to the sticking point, I suppose."

"How quaint! I wonder —— Who is it?"

"That's what everybody is wondering. Personally — I have a sort of idea — that it is that Creole girl."

"Oh, come now! Poor Halberg!"

"Well, she looks rather like a bird in a cage, doesn't she?"

I was startled. I had not believed Jeremy's blue eyes to be capable of such vision, but no sooner had he made the suggestion than I realized its significance. It was possible that my Harmless Satyr with his passion for opening prison doors had discovered a human thing in a cage, a gentle, wide-eyed creature, mute and chained.

"Jeremy," I said, "do you really think ——?"

He nodded his white head.

"A fellow who can sit for five hours and listen to Wagner! A chap who lets birds out of cages. An idealist! The most dangerous people on earth. Explosive. Besides — they imagine things. I daresay he imagines that girl — a victim ——"

"Isn't she?"

"Nonsense. She has plenty to eat and plenty to wear; and look at her diamonds."

"You can't talk materialism to me, my dear. I know you too well. But these Legros people, are they living here?"

"Not in the hotel. The old chap has a huge villa up on the high ground between Chambard and the lake. He just brings the girl out on a chain. Big closed car. Suppose he likes showing her off. Old Sultan."

All this time I was watching the back of Halberg's head and the faces of Monsieur Legros and his wife. Halberg sat as still as a stone faun, with the bouquet of white carnations lying on the table in front of him, but I had a feeling that his eyes were fixed steadily upon the old man and the girl. People were dancing. Their figures

kept moving across my field of vision, and the flow of their movements seemed to emphasize the stillness of the two figures in the red velvet chairs.

The old man sat and glared like a wax figure with fatal eyes. The girl never moved an eyelash. She sat as though under a spell, a frozen princess with the warm life in her glowing but congealed. The music was persuasive. Even my old feet felt rhythmical, but there was not a flicker of those little saffron-coloured shoes.

"Jeremy," I said suddenly, "go and get Halberg."

He gave me a queer look.

"Nothing doing, dear lady——"

"I'm horribly afraid he'll make a fool of himself.

"Men will. Look out!"

For old Legros had made a movement. He had put his two huge hands on the gilded arms of the chair. His square, creased face expressed will force, effort. I saw the girl give a startled glance at him, rise quickly, and put herself behind his chair. Her hands slipped under his arms. She helped him up, and he stood on his feet, slouching rather like a huge old ape. She put his two sticks into his hands, and slowly — very slowly — they came down the long room together, he — with a kind of terrible and defiant grin on his face, she — like a sleep-walker.

I watched Halberg. He sat there with stiff shoulders. His right arm hung at his side, and I saw the fingers of his right hand make a slight, twitching movement as though to grasp the frame of the chair. My impression was that he was looking at the girl. Anyhow they went past him, and he did not stir, the old man with that defiant grin still on his face, the girl — wide-eyed and frightened. I saw Halberg's chin jerk round, and that queer profile of his very white and set.

The girl had her cloak with her, a black velvet thing. She put it on as she and old Legros went slowly over the pile carpet towards the glass doors of the vestibule. They disappeared from my view, and turning to glance again at Halberg, I saw him snatch up his bunch of carnations, rise, and go stalking with a kind of fierce stiffness in the direction of the vestibule.

Without moving, and without looking at him I spoke in a whisper to Jeremy. I knew that half the hotel had been watching

Halberg.

"Go after him — stop him."

And this time he went, getting up with an air of English casualness, and pausing for a moment to simulate interest in an Argentino boy who was tangoing with the dancing instructress. He disappeared, and I sat praying that Halberg would not make a scene, or that Jeremy would waylay him before he could begin fumbling with bird-cages. Jeremy had left his cigarette case on the table, and I purloined a cigarette, and sat smoking.

I had half finished the cigarette before Jeremy returned. He strolled across to the table with his hands in his pockets, his red face studiously blank. He beckoned to a waiter and ordered a whisky and soda. He sat down.

"Halberg's gone."

"What, minus overcoat and hat?"

"Yes, and it's raining. By George — what a chap!"

His blue eyes were very serious.

"What do you think he did?"

"Be quick," I said.

"Dashed out just when their car was moving off, and threw those white carnations in at the window. I was watching him through the glass doors."

I crushed out the lighted stump of the cigarette.

"You ought to have stopped him."

"Thank you! But how was I to know that the mad idiot ——? Besides ——"

"That old fellow may burst a blood vessel."

"By Jove," said Jeremy with an air of sudden and extraordinary brightness, "why — that would do the trick, wouldn't it? Supposing Halberg's not so mad? There's a kind of madness ——"

I sat and stared at the dancers. It occurred to me that there may be other ways of getting rid of an old watch-dog besides the throwing of poisoned meat.

Of course Halberg had no right to assume that because a pretty girl is married to an old curmudgeon like Legros, she is a bird in a cage and predestined to be rescued, though I do believe that Halberg's inspiration was absurdly disinterested. A caged bird or a chained soul roused him to action. It was as though three years

of heartbreak in a wire cage had accumulated in him such a head of passionate rage against all cruelty and oppression that his reaction against them had become instinctive. Idealism has one blind eye, and Halberg's blind eye was turned upon Legros.

The old man was a monster, a jailor, a wrinkled old vampire sucking the blood of youth. Halberg — the Northern hero — had no more pity for him than had Siegfried for the dragon. But here was my poor Harmless Satyr innocently proving himself to the world's eyes just what he was not, a Pan in pursuit of the nymph, of a nymph mated to a very grim old Silenus.

The lord of the villa above Chambard might dodder on two sticks, but he too was something of an original. I suppose that when Halberg's white bouquet came tumbling into the car there was very little said. I could imagine old Legros picking up the bouquet, and with a grin — presenting it to his wife.

"Accept these tributes, my dear. Let us amuse ourselves with this idiot."

Anyway, that was what his subsequent behaviour suggested. Shut his wife up behind the gates of the villa? Not he! For when a man remains masterful and potent to the end and has had some woman trailing dutifully at his heels, he does not surrender to the Halbergs.

Old Legros brought his Yvonne down to the "Palace," and sat with her in the same velvet chairs, and stared with his glassy and fatal eyes at Halberg, who persisted in placing himself at that table by the door. They confronted each other across the polished floor. As for the girl — she looked just as she had looked on the first night, a dusky victim, but how much a victim who can say?

And as though to dip irony in sentiment the girl wore each night in her dress a few of Halberg's white carnations. For each night he arrived with his bouquet, and sat there stiff and white and solitary. Whether it was shyness, or self-restraint, or inherent delicacy of feeling I do not know but he never made a public offering of his flowers, though he might easily have contrived some sort of introduction. He and old Legros sat and stared at each other. And every night — I believe — a white bouquet came tumbling into the Frenchman's car.

Such a situation could not continue. No doubt my poor Harm-

less Satyr became more humanly involved than was satisfying to a disinterested inspiration. I suppose he fell in love with Legros' wife. He seemed to grow thinner and paler. I would meet him walking at a great rate around the lake, skirting the edge of a new tragedy.

Always he would seem glad to see me. He would stop and stand holding his hat in his old courteous and gentle way, and sometimes I saw him at the Kursaal. Of Jeremy I think he saw very little, for Jeremy was shy of people who — as he expressed it — "Were baying the moon." For — apparently — Halberg would go wandering in the hotel garden at eleven o'clock at night, and talk to himself and the stars when Jeremy — who had a room on the first floor above the garden — was trying to get to sleep. It annoyed Jeremy that a man should be such an ass, and so disturbing an ass.

"My dear lady, one doesn't expect to have a Hamlet under your window; no, not in these days, with trams scrooping on the other side of the house. It is no comfort to me to hear a chap saying to the Swiss night — 'She has taken my flowers.' Damn it — it's too much like Italian opera. I have begun to feel a sort of sympathy for old Legros."

I think I sympathized with all of them.

And then — suddenly — Halberg changed the colour of his carnations. I happened to be at the "Palace" on the night when he appeared with red flowers instead of white. He and the Legros went through the same dumb, staring, triangular contest. He followed them out as usual to their car.

How and why it happened I do not know. Possibly the colour of the red carnations had a more apoplectic effect upon the old gentleman. He may have been feeling irritable and stormy. I confess that I did decide to go home on the heels of the three, and when I got to the door I found myself the spectator of pitiful and human happenings.

A powerful electric lamp glared under the glass shell of the hotel porch. Halberg's bouquet of red carnations lay like a red stain on one of the steps, and I was aware of him as a mute and rigid figure posed half in the light and half in the shadow. The car itself was the centre of a little knot of figures, the chauffeur,

the "Palace" concierge, and an under-porter. They were trying to get old Legros out of the car, and I had a glimpse of the face of the girl, a very white still face as she bent forward to try and help them.

I slipped out into the drive and watched. Halberg remained where he was, a fatal figure observing the tragic outcome of its interference. One of the men climbed into the car, and I saw a limp, bunch of a figure lifted out and carried towards the glass doors. Legros' wife followed.

I saw her almost put a foot on Halberg's carnations, and bridle and step aside as though avoiding a pool of blood. She paused. She seemed to hesitate. Then she bent and picked up the bouquet, took three deliberate steps towards Halberg, and threw the red flowers in his face.

After that I smothered myself in between the flowering shrubs that edged the drive. I did not want Halberg to see me, or to realize that the climax had been pried upon by other eyes. I saw the girl disappear through the glass doors. Not a word had been uttered. She left Halberg standing there like a man who was so shocked and astonished that he was incapable of movement. I think he must have stood there for quite three minutes, and with so dreadful a stillness that I too was shocked.

Presently he bent down and picked up the bunch of carnations, holding them flinchingly as though they were white flowers that had been splashed with blood. He had opened the door of a cage, and the bird had flown in his face. Poor, Harmless Satyr! What he did with those fatal flowers I do not know, but he walked off into the night still carrying them. I have a feeling that he went down and threw them into the lake.

Yet the affair was not to end as it appeared to have ended. Old Legros died on a sofa in the office of the manager of the Palace Hotel, and the body was taken up to the huge, red villa above Chambard. Moreover there must have been someone on the watch in Clareux, some little assiduous relative, for the very next day half a dozen alert French people — four men and two women — all solemnly blacked — invaded the villa above Chambard. They had a lawyer with them. I heard all this afterwards from Halberg himself.

And the curmudgeonry of old Legros was exposed to the world. That grin of his had not been without significance. He had left his wife ten thousand francs in 3 per cent. *rentes*. Just that! Villa and diamonds, and motor-car and an estate somewhere in the West Indies reverted to a stuff and sallow-faced French family who owned a velour factory at Amiens.

The inwardness of women is peculiar. I have often wondered whether the girl knew of the cynicism of old Legros' will when she threw those red carnations in Halberg's face. My impression is that she did not. It was the emotional act of an excitable child, a gesture of protest against man's eternal and sentimental interference.

She had been far happier in her cage than a man like Halberg could credit, for even a man's idealism is apt to be so coloured by his consciousness of a woman's sex that he assumes her to be the victim of fate unless she is busy with husband and babies.

But to revert to fact. It was the Amiens family who bundled the girl out of the red villa, shood her out of her cage. She had no legal redress. They straightway handed her over her ten thousand francs — French — and were quit of their responsibilities. No doubt they were immensely relieved. Uncle Legros had had his senile romance, and had behaved in the end like a good Frenchman.

As usual — it was Jeremy who supplied me with the latest information. It appeared that Legros' widow had taken refuge in a shabby little hotel — the "Etoile" in one of the streets behind the station. She had perched there like a rather bewildered bird let out of a cage, helplessly free, and with her supply of bird-seed cut off. Poor Halberg had made a bad mess of the liberation.

But had he?

Jeremy's eyes had a human twinkle.

"He has been patrolling round her hotel like a policeman. Sort of figure of pale and passionate determination — wearing a plush hat. Having let her out he wants to shut her up again."

"All men do," I said.

And I was permitted to witness the beginnings of the last phase. I had wandered up above Chambard between tea and dinner, to look at the orchards in bloom and the fields full of flowers, and to watch the sun flush the Savoyard peaks, and on a little path under the cherry trees I saw two figures. They were walking

shyly and demurely, like a couple of very proper but unconfessed lovers, tremulous but coy, and no doubt discussing music or the mountains, or perhaps even the rate of exchange. Halberg's tall figure seem to overshadow hers. He was carrying his black plush hat in his hand.

I walked on to meet them.

He was very correct, very courteous. His pale blue eyes seemed to glimpse something humorous in my appearance, but without realizing what it was. He introduced the girl to me.

"Yvonne — this is Miss Fraser. Miss Fraser — Madame Legros."

We shook hands. She had a wise, shy, gentle look. She did not remind me of the girl who had thrown those flowers in the face of the Harmless Satyr.

"Mademoiselle is enjoying the sunset?"

Yes — I admitted that I was enjoying the sunset, and added that I hoped to enjoy my dinner; and after a few more amiable nothings I smiled upon them and passed on.

My last glimpse of them — as I turned to get a view of the lake — showed them to me standing side by side under a cherry tree. They too were enjoying the sunset — and something more than the sunset. It seemed to me that Halberg, devoted, adoring, hat in hand, was tempting her to re-enter the eternal cage.

Tom Silver's Bus

HIS WIFE WAS TROUBLED ABOUT HIM, FOR WHEN, AFTER FIFTEEN years of married life, a man becomes moody and strange and sits and stares at the fire and does not always hear what is said to him, a woman begins to ask herself questions.

The Silvers had no children. They had lived in the same cottage in Paradise Row ever since they had been married, a red brick cottage with a green door and railings, and Tom Silver had always kept the little front garden full of flowers. At the back of Paradise Row ran a branch of the River Bourne, and the strips of ground belonging to the cottages ended in the green of old pollarded willows. The Silvers had in their piece of garden a magnificent old pear tree, all white in the spring, and flaming red and gold in the autumn. Blackbirds loved this tree, and on spring mornings early a cock would usually be singing in it.

But Mary Silver was troubled.

For Tom had always been a man of calculable moods and habits, and for years she had had the feeling that she knew all about him that there was to know, but now she was not so sure.

"Hear the bird, mother?"

This spring he had not called her attention to the blackbird in the pear tree, nor had he boasted gently about the size of the polyanthus flowers in the patch of front garden. She had seen him standing quite still with his foot on the garden fork, staring at the soil, but not as though he saw anything singular in the soil. He stared at the fire in just the same way.

Mary would say to herself: "Now, what's wrong with my Tom?"

For a deep and sure affection united them, and like many childless people they had grown into and through each other. Silver was a driver-mechanic, and had worked for a dozen years at "Green's Garage," in Malton. Old Green thought a lot of him, this silent Tom Silver, blond and fresh-coloured, with blue eyes that were

apt to go dreamy, a man who did not like to be talked to when he was at work, and who resented interference. If a sick engine needed a physician, Silver was the man for it. His big, strong, dexterous hands were loving and patient.

For the job was his, and a mere money-getting world is slow to realize how much the job is part of the worker's soul. Tom Silver found his secret joy in it, his justification, little strange ecstasies of self-expression. Something clicked to beneath his skilful fingers, or a stammering engine became sweet and alive.

Always he had come back to Mary with a kind of contentment in his eyes.

"Tea ready, mother?"

He had had the air of a man who had completed something, exorcised some little devil of disharmony. The job was good.

But this spring his eyes had changed. They had a sort of sadness, a perplexity. He did not look at the familiar things about the cottage and garden as he had been accustomed to look at them. He was silent, preoccupied.

Mary was troubled. She knew her man, and that Tom did not go off round the corner. She had never known him to get silly about a girl, and to come back to her looking sheepishly and deceitfully cheerful. He did not drink; he was not interested in "horses." He had no worries, save the worries that attach themselves inevitably to the life of a man who works for a weekly wage.

Was it their lack of children?

Now between Mary and Tom there had always been a simple and intimate confidence. They had nothing to conceal from each other. They were simple people uttering simple words, and giving expression to their natural feelings. They had become necessary to each other in a way that is not understood by those whose mating has been solely and transiently of the flesh.

Mary asked her question.

"What's worrying you, Tom?"

He had slipped his feet into his slippers, and was lighting his pipe while she mended the fire. He held the match to the tobacco, and his hand was steady. He neither resented nor shirked her question; he answered it.

"Blessed if I know, mother."

Which was strange, so strange that she stood holding the poker and looking down at him with a puzzled intentness.

"How can that be?"

His blue eyes raised themselves to her dark ones.

"Sounds silly. Yes, I guess it does. But it isn't exactly worry, mother, it's a sort of feeling."

"A sort of feeling?"

"Yes — that's all I can call it."

She stirred the fire, and her face was thoughtful. She was wise as to the ordinary problems of a working woman's life: the rent, the bills, the fear of sickness, a dread of strikes.

"Nothing wrong at the shop?"

"Nothing."

"No one's been hurting your feelings?"

He smiled. He patted her back.

"No; I've no grouse on. It's a decent shop, and I count a bit with the boss. I'm on the job all the time."

She said, gravely and softly:

"I've never known you like this before."

He answered her just as simply.

"Maybe I'm a glooming fool. It's news to me, mother, but I don't get the feel I did from handling tools."

"You're fed up?"

"No; not exactly that. It's as though something funny was working inside me and couldn't get out."

Now this might have seemed a strange confession for a workingman to make, and a woman less wise than Mary Silver might have been sceptical, but Tom was not the sort of man who boiled over like some fussy little kettle. There was something funny and restless inside him, and what exactly — was it? He could not give it a name, and an unnamed thing casts a shadow.

"Is it something you want and haven't got, Tom?"

"I don't know, old girl."

"Is it because I haven't given you children?"

He looked up suddenly at that. He reached out and drew her against him.

"No; nothing that touches you, mother. I know what I've got. It's just a sort of restlessness. Don't you worry."

But Mary did worry, though she worried in secret, for she had a feeling that her man was not happy, and when he was not happy, no blackbird sang for her in the pear tree. But what was the matter with him? He had a good job; he was respected. When anything difficult had to be done at the garage Tom Silver was turned loose upon it. That sort of pride mattered to a man like Tom, and yet, as she watched him, it seemed to her that the pride had gone out of him. He was less taut upon the shoulders. A vague listlessness possessed him.

She lay awake at night, worrying. She even wondered whether Tom was ill, and whether this moodiness was a symptom, the first shadow of some insidious, creeping sickness. She lay and listened to his breathing, but Tom slept as he had always slept.

Tom Silver knew one thing, he had lost the joy of his hands. He could not say how or why. The strange inwardness of the change was beyond him — that steel should have become dead metal, and an engine a mere machine. The wrench and the drill and the pliers, the reamer, the hack-saw and the hammer did not leap lovingly into his hands. There were days when he was short of temper. He would curse, and in cursing begin to fume and to fumble. Something was out of gear between Tom Silver and his craft.

Then, one evening, looking at the faces of the pansies in his garden, he remembered.

"Funny little devils! They're alive, just like people."

Yes; he remembered. His discontent had dated from that day when there had been a smash in the London road in front of him, and he had gone to help and had found himself helpless. A woman was screaming. She lay there by the kerb, all bloody. And he had stood and stared. The job had beaten him.

He went into the cottage. His eyes had a strange look. He spoke to Mary who was putting fresh buttonholes into a shirt.

"I've got it, mother."

"What, my dear?" For there were times when she called him "my dear" like a child.

"It isn't steel; it's flesh."

She waited upon this strange saying.

"A machine's a dead thing. I haven't got the hands for a thing

that's alive."

He went on to tell her about the smash in the London road. He had been in charge of a private car for the day, driving two ladies up to town; they were going to a theatre. His blue eyes seemed to be looking at the things he described; his big hands rested on his knees.

"It gave me a sort of shock, mother. I was shaky for the rest of the drive. I think it's been on my mind, made me sort of discontented."

"But it wasn't your job, Tom. You can't blame yourself."

His blue eyes stared.

"Well, that's so. But somehow — I seemed to feel that it was the sort of job I wanted to be able to tackle. It wasn't that I was afraid of it. I didn't just know how to tackle it."

"It's doctor's job, my dear."

"In a manner of speaking — yes, old girl. When a machine goes wrong, it's been my job to help to put it right. But a body's more than a machine. I'm always seeing that poor lady lying screaming in the road, and me as helpless as one of those rich young boobs who hog it in high-powered cars and can't do more than lift the bonnet flap when something goes wrong."

She nodded her head at him.

"You want to get to know?"

"That's it, mother."

Knowing him as she did Mary was not surprised when little red books appeared in the cottage, and her man sat at night studying them. She consented. Tom had always been a man for teaching himself things. He was thorough through and through. He would spread out diagrams on the kitchen table, and go to the trouble of making large copies of them in blue and red chalk. He hung these diagrams on the bedroom door, and stood and studied them when he was dressing in the morning.

He was teaching himself the anatomy of the human body as he had taught himself the anatomy of cars. He could have talked to Mary about the brachial and the femoral arteries, and what you might be able to do when a fellow got his throat cut on the jagged glass of a broken windscreen, but he was not a talkative person. Bandages appeared in the cottage, and at night his wife would

humour him and pull off her shoe, and allow him to make use of her leg. She would sit and sew and watch his serious, absorbed face, and his deliberate and dexterous fingers.

One day he came back with the strangest of purchases, an awkward looking object in a sack. Using the backyard as an operating theatre he extracted the object from the sack. He explained the affair to Mary.

"I had to drive old Mr. Morriaty over to that sale at Milford. He said to me: 'Tom, I shall be here most of the day. You had better amuse yourself, somehow.' I had a look over the house, and there was this doll shoved away in a job lot. I had a brain wave, mother, and I bought it."

He exhibited his purchase, a battered lay-model such as is used by artists. Its articulated limbs could be set in any position, and to Tom Silver it would serve as a model of the human figure.

"I can work on it, mother, practise putting up fractures."

Tom's dummy was put to live in the tool shed at the end of the garden, and on summer evenings Tom would get busy on "Cuthbert," as he called the creature. He applied splints and bandages to fractured legs and thighs and arms, and Cuthbert was a model patient. He never struggled or made a fuss.

Mary bore with her man's obsession. She could not see that it was going to have any practical bearing on life, or that Tom would be able to exercise his new craft in the world of reality. But he was absorbed in it; it seemed to have cured his restlessness. He had ceased to sit and stare.

Now, Malton was a rapidly growing town. It had shed its village smock. Houses were springing up everywhere, and new building estates eating into the green fields and causing the death of old trees. Motor cars multiplied. And Malton and its responsible citizens began to visualize the expanding needs of the community.

Malton had its cottage hospital and its local fire brigade, its district nurses, and its various clubs, but its hospital was proving itself inadequate. Also, Malton had taken to itself a bright and brisk new doctor, "Young Smith," as Malton called him. Young Smith was a very live person, and a very capable surgeon. He began to be felt in the place.

One morning Mr. Green came down to the workshop where

Tom was fitting new pistons in an engine.

"Heard the news, Tom?"

Tom had heard some news.

"The town's to have a motor-ambulance, and they have asked me to run it."

Tom straightened his long back. His eyes had grown dreamy.

"Going to do it, sir?"

"Well, yes; but it isn't the job for any ordinary chap. Dr. Smith's been talking to me. Naturally the man who drives the ambulance has got to know how to handle a case."

Tom nodded.

"Obviously. It's not an amateur job. I could take it on."

Old Green stared at him.

"You may be a damned fine mechanic, Tom, but what do you know about first aid?"

"I've been studying. I guess I'm as good as any St. John's Ambulance man, any day. I'm not gassing."

Mr. Green knew that Tom Silver did not gass, but his curiosity was piqued.

"You've been studying? What for?"

Tom wiped his hands on a wad of cotton waste.

"Just felt I had to, that's all. I've seen one bad smash, and it got me cold. No more use than a bloody kid. After that I felt I'd learn something in case I saw another."

Mr. Green — who was a shrewd old John Bull of a man, and who knew just what a fellow like Silver was worth — grunted and looked thoughtful.

"Well, you'd better go up and see Dr. Smith. He's one of those thorough chaps. He doesn't take things on tick."

Tom knocked off work a little earlier than usual, and when Mary heard him coming in the back door she glanced at the clock and wondered why her man was half an hour before his time, but when she saw Tom's face she knew that something had happened, and something that he found good. Also, she allowed him the pleasure of giving her a surprise, because if a man has no one to whom he can say: "Well, what do you think of that!" life is no better than an old clothes shop.

He assumed a casualness.

"Can you put on tea, mother?"

"The kettle's just on the boil."

"Then I'll have a little shaving water."

She allowed him his mystery. But what was the great occasion which demanded that Tom should shave himself a second time in one day? In any other man she would have postulated woman. She heard him rummaging about upstairs, and when he came down to her he was wearing a clean collar and shirt and his dark blue Sunday suit. His eyes had a deep, challenging smile.

She looked him over.

"Well, what's on, my lad?"

"Going up to see Dr. Smith."

"That's the new doctor. Is he wanting a chauffeur?"

"No; it's like this, mother. The town's getting a motor-ambulance. Our people are going to run it. I told the boss I was for the job."

"Whole time?"

"No; part time job. But Dr. Smith's hot stuff. Naturally they don't want a chap on the car who can't handle a case."

Mary poured out his tea.

"I'm glad, Tom," she said. "I know it's what you've been hankering after. I'm glad."

So Tom Silver went up to see Dr. Smith, who was a brisk, stout fellow with the cut of a naval man, and Dr. Smith looked at Silver and liked him. He liked him very well.

Dr. Smith had a bright eye and a mischievous tongue. As a student he had been a slogging boxer, and even now he liked to give a man a punch and see how he reacted.

He questioned Tom.

"Look here, supposing you found a chap in the road with his throat cut, broken glass, and bleeding like hell, what would you do?"

Tom stood like a man on parade.

"Put my fingers to the wound, sir, and try to get hold of the bleeding point."

"You would. And supposing you found a fellow lying beside the road, after an accident, what would you do first?"

"Look at him, sir."

"Look at him?"

"See if I could spot anything before messing him about."

Dr. Smith laughed.

"Who taught you that?"

"Well, when an engine has chucked up, sir, you have a look round before getting out a spanner. Besides, I'm not raw to the job."

Dr. Smith's glance said: "You'll do. You'll do damned well."

And Tom Silver went back to his wife and sat by the fire with her and looked happy.

Tom Silver was very proud of the new ambulance. It had a cream-coloured body, black wings, and a red cross on the side panels, and he cherished it as a man cherishes his first car. But more so, for this ambulance symbolized to Silver his passion to serve; and, in serving, to express that something in himself which makes man imagine God. This was no mere handling of cold steel, but a task into which compassion entered, and in helping the sick and the injured the soul of Tom Silver was satisfied.

There were other men who did not understand this. They said: "Old Tom's got a nerve. No sort of bloody mess seems to put the wind up him. He's a hard nut."

But Tom Silver was anything but hard; he was gentle. His urge to help was so strong that he did not flinch or hesitate. And as his confidence grew his pride in his job grew with it. He knew that he could help those who were helpless.

One winter morning, when the wet pavements had been iced by a sudden frost, someone slipped and broke a leg. It happened just outside the post office, and at an hour when all the doctors were out on their rounds. Tom was sent for, and with a police constable to help him he set the broken leg, and carried the patient off in the ambulance.

Dr. Smith, intercepted somewhere on his round by a telephone message, drove down to the hospital, and seeing Silver afterwards, asked him a question.

"Was that your job, Tom?"

"Yes, sir."

"Couldn't have done it better myself."

Silver went pink under his brown skin, and that flush remained with him all the morning. He carried the warmth of it back to

Mary at the dinner hour, and it helped to add savour to Irish stew.

"That sort of thing makes a job seem worth while, mother."

And Mary knew that her man was finding life good.

Meanwhile Malton grew and flourished amazingly, and its citizens, confronted with the inadequacy of a ten-bed cottage hospital, decided that Malton must step into the line of progress. Dr. Smith blew hither and thither like a stout breeze. Money was promised, fêtes organized, beds endowed. And so it came about that a new hospital was planned and put into being, and Tom Silver watched it grow. He had given his guinea; but he felt that there was more of him than twenty-one shillings in that handsome, red brick building.

It was to be so, for it had been decided by the committee that the new hospital should have a motor-ambulance, and a driver permanently attached to it, and Tom Silver was offered the post.

Old Green was inclined to growl about it. He did not want to part with his prize mechanic. He tackled Tom.

"I'll make it worth your while to stay on."

Tom looked embarrassed.

"It's very good of you, sir, but I've got to go. It isn't that I'm not well satisfied here."

"You'll be dropping good money, and the chance of a share. I'll give you a day to think it over."

Tom went home and put it to his wife.

"I shall be dropping fifteen bob a week, mother."

"Well, drop them, my dear."

He crossed over to where she was sitting and kissed her.

"You always were a great little woman. My heart's in the job."

Two more years passed, and Tom Silver was very much a person. He had a local reputation. Other men said: "There goes old Tom in his bloody old bus." But it was said kindly, for Tom and his sanguinary vehicle were realities in the life of Malton and the neighbourhood. He was something of an autocrat: no one else was allowed to touch his ambulance; the blankets had to be just so, and the stretchers spotless. When Tom had to collect a case from a cottage he was addressed as "Mr. Silver," and there is no doubt that Tom was considered to be as much a public institution as the local police inspector, or the clerk to the Urban District

Council.

Well-to-do cases sometimes offered Tom Silver tips. He accepted tips; he passed them on to Mary, so that there should be less chance of her missing those fifteen shillings.

One foggy day in November, about two o'clock in the afternoon, the ambulance was rung for. The hospital porter who took the message, dashed out to warn Tom.

Station bus had a smash on Tipsy Hill.—Urgent.

Tom knew those station buses, clattering, ramshackle, go-as-you-please crates of glass and tin that careered up and down to and from Malton station. Often he had cursed those buses and their drivers, but the strangest thing of all was that he did not remember that Mary was going over to Telford market to shop, and that she had taken one of those buses to the station. He just forgot, or his job and its urgency left a blind spot in his mind. He had his ambulance out and on the road in less than a minute after the porter had warned him.

He got to the place before the doctors. In the fog he saw a row of fir trees, and one of those tin-pot buses with its silly wheels in the air half in and half out of a clump of furze, and round it a little group of people. He sprang down, he elbowed through.

"Anybody hurt?"

Someone stared him in the face. And then he heard a voice, a little, moaning voice: "I want my Tom. Will someone fetch my Tom."

Silver saw her lying there on the grass; two men were kneeling, and one of them was fumbling with a handkerchief. The handkerchief was all red, so were the man's hands, and he had the flurried, helpless air of a fellow who was frightened.

"She's bleeding like—— I can't—— Where are the doctors?"

Silver was down on his knees. He had edged the other man aside.

"It's all right, mother; I'm here."

But within him there was terror, such fear as he had never known. He remembered afterwards that his hands had felt paralyzed until the warm blood had touched them, and they had

seemed to become alive. They were him: the man, Tom Silver. Afterwards, his lower lip showed red where he had bitten it.

The doctor came. It was Smith.

"What, Tom, good lord, man! It's——"

Silver's teeth showed in a kind of smile.

"All right, sir, I've got my fingers in it. Artery—broken glass."

"Good. Can you hang on?"

"What do you think."

"Right, you stick to it while we lift."

That night Tom Silver was sitting in front of the fire in the hospital porter's room. He had been home once to the cottage in Paradise Row to fetch some things for his wife, and to feed the cat, but he had not wanted to stay there. The cottage was too empty and strange; so he sat and waited and wondered; and the hospital seemed a silent place, and this silence was like a door that presently would open.

It did open. A face looked in, the waggish, kindly, mischievous face of Dr. Smith.

"All right, Tom. She'll do."

That was all. He closed the door, and Tom sat and stared at the fire. He thought: "Seems strange somehow how things happen. Just as though they were meant to happen. Maybe God means 'em to happen."

Poet and Peasant

IT HAPPENED IN THE DAYS BEFORE SHORT SKIRTS, AND IT HAPPENED to three people who were considered rather eccentric by the conventionalists of that epoch.

Sanchia painted pictures and rented a bungalow on Chudleigh Moor. Her pictures were approaching the pose of the purple and orange school, and she was one of the first persons to indulge in black ceilings and white floors. Sanchia's attitude to life was such that if she saw a vase or a convention standing right way up, she was impelled to turn it upside down. Incidentally, a bungalow on Chudleigh Moor in January was a reversal of the seasons in their sanity, more especially so when a little flat in Chelsea offered her a hot bath that was neither of the hip-bath order nor filled by the aid of cans.

Oscar wrote poetry. He was fat and flaccid and sallow, and wore his very black hair plastered like a Dutch doll's, a sort of art-cretonne of a man, and of an amazing and drawling insolence. He wore flame-coloured dressing-gowns, and cultivated an odour of decadence. Also, he cultivated Sanchia, because he thought her thin and fierce, and *farouche*, a sort of beggar wench who could scratch like a cat. Oscar liked to write poems — he called them "pomes" — about gutter-ladies and cocottes and amateur Madame Bovaries, and be-drugged French artists, and he had added Sanchia to the collection, which — of course — was an insult to Sanchia, but Oscar posed and prospered upon his impertinences.

John neither posed nor painted. He was a rather shaggy, large, blue-eyed creature who strode through the world in rough tweeds. He had a cottage on the Moor; he had had cottages and shacks all over the world. He was a tramping naturalist of the Hudson school, with a passion for birds, a private income of a few hundreds a year, and a public that purchased his books by the dozen. He was a somewhat silent person, perhaps because he had spent

so much of his life in open spaces, listening and watching and lying under hedges and bushes in the heather and long grass. Sanchia described him as "having hay in his hair."

Early in the January of that year Oscar came down to stay with the Careys of Lee Manor. It was a strange thing of Oscar to do in January, for the Careys were dull people, but the weather was mild, and Lee Manor was only four miles from Sanchia's bungalow. Also, the Careys had a car, and to Oscar, who never walked more than a mile; a car was a necessity. He borrowed it, as he borrowed everything, with the air of conferring a favour.

"You had better keep that car, Carey. You can tell people that Oscar Flack once sat in it."

He was a flaneur, but he took his poetry very seriously, and John, arriving at Sanchia's bungalow about tea-time, and dreaming himself into a *tête-à-tête* with Sanchia before the fire, completed the new triangle.

Martha, Sanchia's indispensable, met him and took his hat. She approved of John.

"There's another gentleman here, sir."

John's blue eyes stared.

"Oh, well, that's all right."

He was ushered in, and his arrival interrupted Oscar's reading of a little thing of his on "Orange Pulp in Covent Garden."

They had not met before. Sanchia introduced them, and it occurred to her to think that they might be rather amusing together. Oscar, remaining seated on the tuffet, presented John with a first finger to shake.

"How de do."

John, holding the finger, and looking surprised and not knowing what to do with it, was suddenly moved to give that fat finger a twist, but he refrained. He was mute. He sat down in a chair and displayed his big boots and thick grey stockings. He seemed to smell of the heather.

There should have been the silence of embarrassment, but silence and Oscar never cohabited. As a conversationalist he was what they called in those days "utterly utter." He did utter. He talked while tea was coming in; and while it was being poured out, and while it was being consumed. He got hold of bits of buttered

toast with his fat white fingers, and managed to talk and toas himself simultaneously. He talked about Debussy, and "poor old Tom Hardy and his poetical pomposities," and the last thing in Grand Guignol. He knew that he was annoying John, and he went on annoying him. He was like a griffon yapping at a St. Bernard.

John sat malevolently still, and ate buttered toast, or as much of it as Oscar chose to leave him. And Sanchia, at her ease on the hearthrug, with her arms clasping her knees, thought John's solemn face infinitely funny. Almost he looked as though Oscar was a bad cheese.

But she did try to drag John into the conversation. She liked John. She told him to light his pipe, and she mentioned to Oscar that John was interested in birds.

Oscar tried a quip.

"My dear sir, do you keep canaries? I once had a canary."

"Indeed," said John, "did you?"

"The most Victorian bird. It must have been a she. It used to tweet — 'Albert — Albert.' "

John plugged tobacco in his pipe.

"I see, quite lyrical. These things are catching."

And then they looked at each other slantwise as men will, and knew that there could be murder between them, though in John's hands Oscar would have been less than a sack of stale flour.

Now when Oscar was annoying anybody he felt his sleekest and his happiest, and if he could combine impertinences towards Mrs. Grundy with a mild intrigue with some attractive woman, then the situation was flawless. For to Oscar, John symbolized the British Constitution, and the lions in Trafalgar Square, and St. Paul's Cathedral, and a public that go dotty over a novel like "Lorna Doone." Oscar, being Irish, was always making terrible fun of the English, and John was so very English. It was easy to twist his tail.

At least, it appeared so, and Oscar sat him out at Sanchia's on two successive afternoons, and treated John like an overgrown boy, and had the best of the fire, and apparently the best of Sanchia. He absorbed so much of the fire that Sanchia was moved towards playfulness.

"Martha tells me that we are down to the last hundredweight."

"Of what, dear lady?"

"Coal."

"A shortage of coal! But surely there are coal merchants in Devon, as well as Drakes and noble fellows."

"My coal comes seven miles by road. I have two tons on order."

Oscar spread his hands.

"Oh, God will provide."

He looked at John.

"Besides, here we have Master Ridd who looks as though he could carry a sack of coal or a sheep."

John brooded.

"Yes, I might manage to dispose of a sheep."

Meanwhile a most strange conglomeration of circumstances combined to produce an unexpected situation. The weather changed suddenly; it grew cold; it banked up masses of blue grey cloud; the dry bracken shivered in a north-east wind.

Martha's mother fell sick in a distant village, and Martha begged a day off and disappeared to catch the carrier's van which would take her into Boon Tracey.

Sanchia's coal had not arrived, though it was supposed to be on the road.

The Careys' car brought Oscar to Sanchia's bungalow, but Oscar had been told that the car could not wait for him and that he would have to walk back. The Careys might be dull people, but they were growing a little tired of Oscar, and of being listed on life's store-list under the heading of "Poets, people for the use of, Mark Three."

The north-east wind set its teeth. The sky grew more and more ominous.

When John walked over the moor he knew what was coming, and Oscar should have known, but to Oscar snow was about as real as sugar icing on a cake, and when John arrived at Sanchia's cottage he found the poet and Sanchia sitting in front of a very small fire. Oscar was not feeling poetical; he was feeling the cold, and that in spite of all the white blubber that he carried. Sanchia looked both a little worried and amused. She rose to make tea.

"Martha's had to go to Tedworthy."

"Oh," said John, with an air of being profoundly wise about

something.

"You did not see my coal-cart anywhere?"

"No. Nothing but one old crow."

They had tea, they sat, they smoked, they talked, though Oscar did most of the talking, and from time to time, being next to the coal-box, he would extract a lump of coal with the tongs and place it on the fire. He kept most of the heat from John, just as he contrived to keep him out of the conversation. But the moment arrived when Oscar groped for the last time in the coal-box.

"Do be careful. That's my last scuttle."

Oscar looked blandly amused.

"Dear lady, is that so? For it seems that I have fished out the last lump."

He chuckled faintly. Really, the joke was against Sanchia, for he was walking back to Lee Manor where there was plenty of coal.

"Subject for a picture. The last cartridge! Obviously, Sanchie, you will have to go to bed, and be Miss Moody till the coal comes."

Almost he winked at John who was filling a second pipe and staring at the diminishing fire. And suddenly John asked him a question.

"Ever been down a mine?"

"Dear sir—I should get so dirty."

And John smiled, a quiet sort of smile. It was as though he could hear the snow falling outside Sanchia's bungalow, a veritable blizzard, banking up against walls and doors, clogging windows, effacing roads, and piling drifts on Chudleigh Moor. He smiled and lit his pipe. Yes, this fat and flabby ass could go on talking, while the snow came down, and turned Chudleigh Moor into a primitive wilderness.

Sanchia was looking a little anxious. Also, the room was growing very cold, and Martha had not returned.

"I think it must be snowing."

John got up slowly and went to the window and drew back the edge of a curtain.

"Oh, just a few flakes, nothing much."

He wanted Oscar to go on talking, for when Oscar's interior warned him that dinner at Lee Manor was at seven-thirty, and that he had an hour's walk before him, the snow might have some

surprises for this conceited ass; so John listened with an air of interest to Oscar's views upon the poetical genius of Yeats. Meanwhile the fire grew less and less, and Sanchia began to hunch her shoulders and to indulge in little suggestive shivers. Really, the situation was growing serious, for the log-box was as empty as the scuttle, and on Chudleigh Moor gas stoves and electric heaters did not exist. Certainly there was a small oil stove in the kitchen, but Sanchia did not know how much oil might be left in the five gallon drum that stood in the scullery. Yes, the situation was ominous. Supposing it snowed hard during the night and the roads became blocked? Oscar's dissertation upon the poetic genius of Mr. Yeats became impertinent and superfluous.

She looked at the clock.

"My lad, it's five minutes past six."

"Five past six! The minstrel and the winter wind. They are most disgustingly punctual at the Manor."

Sanchia rose. She was not worrying about Oscar's winter walk; she was wondering why Martha had not arrived, and what would happen to the evening meal. Oscar was putting on his overcoat, and John lighting a third pipe. He had the air of a man who was waiting for the fun to begin.

Sanchia went to the door. John heard her open it, utter a sudden exclamation, and close the door hurriedly.

"Good heavens! It's an absolute blizzard."

She came back into the light. A snowflake had settled on her hair, and others on her dress.

"It's an absolute blizzard. How utterly surreptitious of it."

She looked at John as though she expected him to do something, but John sat smoking his pipe.

"Yes, it happens rather suddenly up here, at times."

He glanced at Oscar.

"You had better push off before it gets too thick. I'll see you as far as the lane."

He got up and put on his cap, took his ash stick, and opened the door. A whirl of white flakes drifted in, and Oscar, who was thinking of his dinner and the fires at Lee Manor, stood and stared at the unexpectedness of the winter night.

"By Jove—I can't go out in that. It's too——"

John turned and looked at him.

"Oh, yes, you can. You have only got to follow the road. No use hanging about. Good night, Sanchia."

He edged Oscar out into the snow, and closed the door, and found Oscar's black shape blocking the path.

"I say — I can't see ——"

"Come on. I'll put you in the lane. You have only to follow the lane."

He took Oscar by the arm and shepherded him down the path and out of the gate. He was most unsympathetic.

"You turn left — I turn right. I should make tracks if I were you. It's getting rather thick. Good night."

John stood there until he had convinced himself that Oscar was making a sincere attempt to walk to Lee Manor, and then he turned to the right, and made for his cottage. It was less than a quarter of a mile away, but when he reached it he was like a snow man. He stamped his feet and shook himself in the porch. He gave way to inward laughter. It was a nice situation. Possibly it might teach Sanchia a thing or two, and prove to the poet that a winter night on Chudleigh Moor was not a mere cream meringue.

Though as a matter of fact the situation was developing on lines that were unforseen by John. He had supposed that Oscar would get about as far as *The Green Yaffle* down by Stone Bridge, and take refuge there for the night. It would not be a very comfortable night, and John was glad.

But Oscar did not get as far as the inn. He fell into a young snowdrdift and was considerably frightened. He was not made of the stuff which goes to the creating of arctic explorers.

Sanchia was investigating the contents of the paraffin drum in the scullery. It contained a little less than a pint of oil, and in transferring it to the stove's container she spilt quite a lot of it over one foot.

"Oh, damn!"

She did not like paraffin, or paraffin stoves. Messy things! But she might be able to warm up something on the stove. Also, the bungalow was beginning to feel like a flimsy cricket pavilion on the top of a mountain. No coal, no Martha, and John had gone and left her in the lurch. She felt very much peeved.

And then she heard a knocking, and gave inward thanks. It would mean Martha or the coal, and she hurried to the bungalow's door and opened it and let in a swirl of snow, and discovered Oscar.

"You!"

There was no joy in her voice, and there was no joy in Oscar. He wore a white plaster all over him. He was not quoting poetry.

"Sanchie. Quite impossible. Awful night. I should have got lost."

She said:

"But you can't come in here."

He stared. What a shock to be met on such a night by the creature of convention in the person of his Isoult of the Moor.

"Can't?"

"Of course not. You must go on to John's."

Almost he whimpered.

"But I don't know where John lives. Besides——"

The snow was drifting in and she let him into the passage, and half-closed the door, and when she had done it she realized that probably he would stay in. Also, she had a feeling that Oscar was rather a mean creature. He was like a fat and selfish boy who would snivel, and then burst into nasty giggles when the crisis had passed.

She said:

"Why haven't we a telephone! It's perfectly—— I'd better take you up to John's."

But he was removing his coat. He gave way to an incipient shiver.

"Can't be done, Sanchie. You've no idea what the night's like."

She began to have new ideas of Oscar as a man.

"Oh—very well. Do you mean to stay the night?"

"Well—really! Do you expect me to——?"

"There's no bed for you."

"No bed?"

"Of course not. I'm not going to give you Martha's."

With characteristic casualness he hung his caked coat over the back of a chair which was covered by a beloved piece of Japanese embroidery, and Sanchia exclaimed:

"Take that thing off. It will ruin——"

He stared, and removed it. Yes, certainly Sanchia was rather touchy.

"I can sleep on the sofa."

He suggested it with an air of magnanimity, and she turned to go back to the kitchen.

"Perhaps. I'll see."

About eight o'clock in the morning, John, having had his early cup of tea, lit a pipe, and went out upon the day's adventure. Sanchia might need rescuing, though, cunning watcher of birds that he was, he had found wisdom in leaving her to discover what Chudleigh Moor was like when the snow came down. He ploughed through it. The day was gorgeous, but bitterly cold, with the sun shining on a white world, and a little crisp, icy breeze blowing from the north.

John approached the bungalow, and avoiding the door, went round to the sitting-room window. He flattened himself against the wall and looked in. He was presented with the most unexpected of tableaux. Sanchia was on her knees in front of the grate, trying to make some sort of fire out of the remains of a sugar-box and last night's cinders. Oscar sat huddled on the sofa with his back to the window, wrapped up in a blue eiderdown, and looking as blue as the quilt.

John's eyebrows bristled.

"So you sneaked back, did you!"

He drew away towards the bungalow's porch. He stood and considered the situation. Now, how exactly should it be handled? He had left a hearty fire leaping up the cottage chimney, and a frying-pan ready for bacon and eggs. He smiled. He knocked at Sanchia's door.

She opened it. Her hands were black, her little nose pinched, and John met her breezily.

"Well, how's life?"

She was in a temper near to tears. Things had been sufficiently exasperating without having a helpless mass of fat like Oscar sitting shivering on the sofa.

"John, it's simply too awful."

"What — the weather?"

"Oh, yes, that. But we're simply frozen, and the oil stove has given out."

"We? Has Martha come back?"

She lowered her voice. She glanced malevolently over her shoulder, and then went and shut the inner door.

"He — sneaked back!"

"What, Oscar?"

"He's about as useless as —— I let him sleep on the sofa. He expects me — somehow — to produce a breakfast. There's not going to be any breakfast."

John wanted to laugh, but he appeared immensely grave.

"I say, Sanchia, you don't mean to say that fellow spent the night ——"

"Oh, don't be silly. Do you think I wanted him?"

She rubbed her hands together; her little nose was like ivory, and John noticed that she had buttoned herself up in a Scotch tweed coat. His inspiration was upon him.

"Look here, I've got a fire up at my place, and plenty of coal, and bacon and eggs, my dear, and hot tea."

Almost she moistened her cold lips with her tongue. She looked at the snow.

"Could I walk? And what about Oscar?"

"Oh, damn Oscar! Besides ——"

And suddenly he caught her up and held her like a baby.

"No need to walk. Rather deep in places. You leave it to me."

Her astonishment hesitated between anger and delight.

"Bacon and eggs, John?"

"Yes."

"How lovely."

He carried her down the path into the lane, the deep snow muffling the sound of his footsteps, and Oscar, who had gone down on his knees and was puffing at a little wad of paper that he had lit under Sanchia's pile of box wood, remained in ignorance of this act of brigandage. He blew sedulously at the timid flames.

And Sanchia was laughing, and looking strangely into John's face.

"You — are — strong. I wonder what Oscar will do?"

John smiled.

"That's his problem. Let him solve it."

But for the moment Oscar was absorbed in making that small fire burn, even if it should not burn for very long. He wanted to

impress Sanchia; he had more than a suspicion that he had lacked impressiveness, and that an unshaven chin did not suit him. Confound the snow! It was a barbarous business, and he had neither razor nor hair brushes, and his hands felt like two lumps of cold fat. Just like a couple of women to leave ordering in fresh coal until there was none left in the house. But what was Sanchia doing? He had fancied that he had heard John's voice, but he was not going to show himself to that bucolic person. He wanted Sanchia to come in so that he could say: "Look at the fire I've made," and no Sanchia reappeared.

He grew suspicious. He called to her:

"Sanchie, hallo, come and look at the fire."

No one answered. He grew anxious, anxious about all sorts of things, his breakfast, his dignity, but when he discovered those footmarks in the snow he forgot his dignity. Actually he blundered out into the lane and saw those deep impressions full of shadow stippling the white surface and disappearing over the hill. They puzzled him, for there appeared to be only one set of tracks, and Sanchia could not have made those huge hoofmarks.

Angry and depressed, he went in to forage some sort of breakfast. He found half a cold tongue in the larder, and the remains of yesterday's milk, and bread and butter. Hopefully he tried to warm up the kettle on that decrepit fire, and the fire gave up the ghost under that chilly weight of metal and cold water.

Oscar sat down and ate cold tongue and bread and butter, but the food did not seem to warm him. The room grew more and more of an ice-house. He gloomed; he wrapped the quilt round him. He had a feeling that somehow Sanchia had played him a dirty trick. Oh, damn the cold! His pride began to shiver.

Up at John's cottage things were otherwise. A fire blazed, and Sanchia, on two cushions, unfolded herself like a flower. A kettle steamed on the hob, and that practical person of a John was cracking eggs and dropping them neatly into the frying pan.

"Here you are, Sanchia, you fry while I lay the table."

"What a joke!"

"Rather, isn't it."

"Just lovely. I wonder what Oscar's doing?"

She laughed so that the eggs shook.

"Did you see him?"

"I did. Rolled up in a quilt."

"A blue quilt. And his hair! Oscar doesn't look nice in the morning, especially with a beard."

John was laying the table.

"Be careful with that pan, young woman. I don't like my eggs broken."

"You — are — a tyrant."

"Perhaps."

Cold tongue and bread and butter lay heavy on Oscar's stomach. Oh, for a warm drink! And that flimsy bungalow seemed to grow colder and colder. He worked up a rage, a humiliated heat, he put on his coat and dared the snow. He floundered up hill in the direction of John's cottage, following those huge depressions. He came to John's cottage, and saw smoke ascending from the chimney. So there was a fire.

His pride oozed out of his boots. Hot tea! And perhaps that fellow would lend him a razor, and allow him a jug of hot water. But he, too, went to peer through a window, and there in front of the fire he saw two people seated upon cushions. John was smoking a pipe, and had an arm round Sanchia, and in Sanchia's mouth there was a cigarette. On the table lay the tantalizing relics of a hot breakfast.

And Oscar felt grieved, disillusioned. He despaired of the world.

"Selfish beggars."

But he tapped at the window.

"Hallo, you two."

Incredible selfishness! John got up and deliberately pulled down the blind!

Gustave

ON MY FIRST NIGHT AT THE HOTEL TELAMONE AT TINDARO HE came and stood beside my table. That he was uncomely to the point of grotesqueness I will not deny, and yet when he spoke in his deliberate and accurate English I received so pleasant an impression of courtesy and kindliness that his very plainness became likeable.

He hoped that I had had a good journey, and did I wish for the wine list?

As a matter of fact my "sleeper" from Rome had been shared by a gentleman who had coughed when he was not sleeping and had snored when he was not awake. I accepted the wine list from the *maître d'hôtel's* fat hand. I noticed that he wore a gold signet ring.

"Anything that you can recommend?"

He gave me a little, deprecating and humorous smile, and when he smiled his eyes rolled upwards and disappeared behind closed eyelids. He had a queer, porcine profile, and half a lemon stuck in his mouth would have completed the picture. He wore his brown hair *en brosse*. A gold watch-chain looped itself across the bulge of a white waistcoat.

"Every wine in the list is recommended, sir."

I caught his droll little eye reappearing.

"That's rather embarrassing."

"But some are more recommended than others, sir. And we have English whisky."

That settled it: Wine, French, Italian or Spanish, red or white, liked me less than I liked its flavour. I ordered a bottle of whisky and a syphon, and watched the *maître d'hôtel* waddle briskly away. His black trousers were very baggy, his dress coat well cut. He had an air, a certain presence; he looked meticulously clean and well polished, a man of substance. That he was to become for me a figure of human and naïve dignity was for the moment beyond

my foreseeing. I regarded him as a polite and capable person who was about to provide me with a drink.

Half of the tables of the "Telamone" were unoccupied, for it was early in the season, and when the *maître d'hôtel* returned with my whisky and a syphon he remained for a moment beside my table. But his little, intelligent eyes watched everything. He had a way of turning on his heels, his stout body revolving as though his feet were pivoted.

"If you would prefer a table by one of the windows, sir."

I supposed that there was a view when the windows were unshuttered. He raised his hands, palms turned towards me.

"Magnificent, sir."

"Then — I would like a window."

He said that he would arrange it to-morrow.

My friend had not exaggerated the beauty of the view from the windows of the Hotel Telamone. It stood on the edge of a cliff, with the rocks below it grey-green with agave, aloe and prickly pear, and the foot of the cliff seemed washed by the Ionian sea. Across the sheeted blueness the Calabrian coast loomed dimly like a cloud bank, with here and there a white town glimmering. North and south — the Sicilian coast — thrusting out into blue-black headlands or creased with the green of lemon groves and olives — had the same exquisite texture as sky and sea. The almonds and the fruit trees were beginning to whiten. Cypresses threw long shadows. Under my window a golden mimosa sent up its perfume.

Of Tindaro itself many people have written. I would describe it as a conglomeration of goats, mangy donkeys, swarthy dogs with moles and moustaches, chickens, curio shops, vociferous motors, smells, garbage, and very dirty children. It has a picturesqueness: old houses, old walls, the red and grey ruins of a fine Graeco-Roman theatre. It has one passably clean street — the Corso — where you met everybody — from the waiter who attends to you — to some novelist or other spending roylaties. I am not concerned with Tindaro. It is a place where people with money can strike attitudes and buy old rugs and gilded furniture and Roman pottery and velvets and damasks — and blue amber, and smell some superlative smells. I am concerned with Gustave — a Swiss — with a protruding white waistcoat, and two intelligent little eyes, and an air of

benignly bearing some secret and human burden. He interested me more than Tindaro. He appeared like a sagacious and patient elephant going solidly about his particular business in a land of melancholy monkeys.

For Gustave did the unexpected. He began straightway to pique my curiosity. I had a favourite chair in the hotel garden at the edge of a terrace, and every morning at twelve o'clock Gustave would appear in his black clothes and white waistcoat, toddle down a flight of narrow steps to a ledge where a few olive trees grew, seat himself on a garden chair, produce a pair of field-glasses, and observe something going on below. The railway line and Tindaro station lay between the cliff and the sea. The station was visible, with its rank of waiting cars and buses, and at about twelve o'clock the train from the north arrived. It seemed obvious to me that Gustave watched the train and the arrivals. It was part of his thoroughness, his foresight; he was one of the most thorough persons I have ever met.

"Counting the people who get into the Telamone bus," I thought; "the number of the new arrivals for lunch. How Swiss!"

But I was wrong. I found that out later.

Also, Gustave had a friend, a huge grey goat belonging to one of the flocks that grazed on the stony hillsides, an enterprising creature, carrying mythology to the very door of the hotel. It shared with a one-legged player upon the Sicilian pipe the privilege of loitering upon the roadway leading to the hotel. It seemed a very tractable creature, nibbling the herbage growing on the low stone parapet above the deep drop to the olive groves below. Occasionally when the piper was piping the goat would get up on its hind legs or buck. I never saw it threaten anybody with its horns. Had it done so the management of the Telamone would have intervened.

Gustave would feed this thing daily with a little bunch of green food. Whenever he appeared at the doorway of the hotel the goat —if it happened to be in sight— would trot up to him. It would offer its head to be rubbed, now and again giving a little playful tap at Gustave's hand with its horns.

Being present one morning, I shared the attentions of the goat, and words of wisdom with Gustave.

"Pan and his pipes?" I asked; "is that it?"

No, it was not; though Gustave knew all about Pan, and the old ruffian of a one-legged piper who had a ready cap and Sicilian blessings, and curses — which no tourist understood.

"I prefer the goat, sir," said Gustave; "animals don't mutter foul words if you don't throw five centimes."

I was inclined to agree with Gustave.

"You ought to keep a dog," I said.

He gave me one of his droll and blessed smiles.

"Sir — I keep a daughter."

I was interested. His heavy face had grown suddenly tender.

"Here, in Tindaro?"

"Yes. She is just as high as that."

He extended a hand, palm downwards.

"Seven years. She lodges with the Swiss woman who keeps the tea-shop. A very good woman. Rosalie is quite happy there."

"Of course — you see her every day?"

"Of course, sir. I have two hours each afternoon. We go out together. That is why I work so hard."

I liked the man, and I suppose he felt my liking, for he began to tell me of some of his early experiences. As a lad of nineteen he had gone to London to learn the language; he had obtained a post as waiter at the Cosmopolis Hotel. "They allowed you three drops there, sir. I was a nervous boy. I had two drops. And then — one evening — a gentleman getting up suddenly knocked a sauce-boat with his shoulder. I was discharged next day. I had six weeks walking the streets, with nothing in my pocket."

"How did you live?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"How does one? I was young then. I could not do it now. But I have never forgotten. Nor the good Samaritan ——"

"There are such people, Gustave."

He smiled.

"Oh, yes, people who have eyes and hearts."

He was not in the least bitter, but somehow I divined in him a sadness, a vague fear. Perhaps it was the fear that those six weeks of hunger and homelessness had planted in him — fear, too, for his child.

"I save money, sir. I do not smoke; I do not drink. There shall be no such six weeks for my daughter."

I liked the man. He was a good fellow. The Swiss staff in the dining-room worked under him with admirable and contented briskness. I never saw him bullying any of them, nor heard him raise his voice; apparently it was not necessary; they respected him. And my whisky remained my whisky; no surreptitious nips were taken from the bottle.

One afternoon, when I was idling away an hour in the sun amid the ruins of the classic theatre, I came upon Gustave and a child seated on the grass. The child had the father's soft felt hat in her lap, and Gustave's cropped head was profiting by the sunlight.

She was a pretty, dark little thing with bright eyes, very red lips, and a mop of crisp black hair, as unlike her father as a child could be. She looked sensitive and rather fragile, and in her brown eyes something seemed to lurk.

"This is Rosalie, Mr. Stephens."

Gustave was for getting up, but I told him to stay where he was, and after taking the child's shyly-offered hand, I sat down on the grass with them. About us rose the old red walls, their crevices and broken arches filled with the intense blue of the sea. Behind us rose a little rocky hill covered with prickly pear, and rosemary and asphodel. Away south Aetna loomed in the distance.

The child seemed shy of me, so I talked to Gustave, and found myself wondering about the child's mother. Gustave had never mentioned his wife; one might presume that she was dead, and that the good fellow kept the sorrow locked away with himself. Yet the child was so different from the father; she was graceful and aery, and quick with her glances and her colour. She looked at you from her shyness like a little woodland sprite peeping from a thicket.

Gustave sat and beamed. It was easy to see that the child was everything to him. He held out a hand, and she snuggled over to him; she had been tucking flowers into the band of her father's hat.

"You are being decorated, Gustave."

He rolled his eyes at me.

"To-morrow is Rosalie's birthday. We were planning——"

I smiled at the child.

"Felicitations, Rosalie. And what is the age to be?"

"Eight, monsieur."

Gustave cuddled her.

"We are going for a drive in an autocar: Rosalie, papa, and Mademoiselle Lulu. Lulu is a doll, sir, the principal doll in Tindaro. We shall buy her on the way home.

Rosalie threw me an elf's glance.

"Her eyes move, monsieur, and she has a shingled head."

"An up-to-date young lady. Even dolls, Gustave——"

"Even dolls, sir, have to move with the times."

They were so happy together that I took myself off and had tea at the English tea-shop, and on the way back to Telamone I came upon Gustave and his daughter walking up the Corso. He had the child by the hand. He looked huge and clumsy beside her, a grotesque parading with a fairy, but I knew by now that the soul of a Swiss waiter can walk with God.

I think it was two days later when I saw Gustave go down to his look-out on the terrace where the olives grew, and turn his glasses on to Tindaro station. The twelve o'clock train had arrived, but I had grown accustomed to the mid-day train and Gustave's binoculars, and I turned over the pages of my paper. A breeze made the paper play tricks with me, and I was struggling with a mischievous sheet when I happened to catch sight of Gustave's face as he came up the narrow steps. The man had a scared, breathless look. He paid no attention to me, but went trotting up the garden, still holding his binoculars in his right hand.

"Heavens!" I thought, "a whole trainload has arrived for the Telamone, and Gustave is short of *hors d'œuvres*."

I saw him pass through the arched gate of the garden, and ascend the steps of the hotel. But he did not enter the hotel. I saw him go hurrying along the raised roadway. He had been joined by that absurd grey goat who appeared to regard Gustave's haste as part of a game, and went frisking beside him. They disappeared together into Tindaro, a hatless and stout head-waiter in evening dress and that prancing, horned creature.

Something was in the air. The memory of Gustave's scared and hurrying face began to suggest happenings more serious than a

shortage or an omission. He had not entered Tindaro in search of a few tins of sardines, or a bottle of olives, and somehow his fat and anxious face seemed to connect itself with my mind-picture of his child. For some reason or other he had dashed off to his Rosalie, to the *pâtissèrie* shop kept by Madame Bozio. But why? And what had the arrival of the twelve o'clock train to do with it, if it had anything to do with it?

I went into lunch feeling interested. Gustave was there, but not the Gustave of normal and attentive blandness. The man had a worried face, and eyes that expressed secret apprehension. He was restless; he kept fussing up and down among the tables; he bumped against one and upset a vase of flowers. He apologized. His forehead had a moist look. When he came to my table with a menu card in his hand I noticed that his fingers were conveying a fine tremor to the card.

I felt that I wanted to say something to the man, something friendly and reassuring.

"How's Rosalie to-day——? Quite well——?"

He did not seem to hear me. He was staring at the glass door of the *salle-à-manger*. New arrivals were entering.

"Excuse me, monsieur."

He disappeared behind my back, and I heard him being polite to the newcomers, but the voice was not the placid, debonair voice of the Gustave whom I knew. It was the voice of a man speaking empty words while his inward self remained inarticulate in the presence of some torturing emotion.

It was my habit to indulge in a little siesta after lunch. The window of my room looked south towards Aetna. I had closed the jalousies and dozed off, when the voice woke me. It was a woman's voice, loud and resonant and angry; it seemed to be tearing a temper to tatters; it scolded and threatened and declaimed. Also, it tore my sense of peace to tatters; it was the sort of voice that throws grit into the eyes of a man's soul.

"Confound it! Who the devil——?"

I got up and opened the shutters, and the little drama displayed itself in the hotel roadway below me. There was poor Gustave making expostulating and placating gestures to a tall woman who had come there determined to make an abominable scene. She was

a handsome creature, very smartly dressed. She seemed to be clawing the air in front of his face. Obviously she was his wife, for she was announcing the fact to my window. She was calling poor Gustave a pig, and a dog and a villain. He had deserted her. He had taken her child away, her dear little Rosalie, her angel. But she was a woman and a mother. She would have her rights.

Poor Gustave flapped his arms helplessly.

"Be quiet, Hortense. If you will be quiet——"

"Where is the child—you——"

His stout figure seemed to solidify.

"She is not here——"

"Liar——"

It was a deplorable scene. I could see the heads of the concierge and the two porters protruding from the hotel doorway, and suddenly it occurred to me that I ought to go down and rescue poor Gustave. I might be able to put an end to the scene. I did go down. I found the woman walking to and fro like a fury in a cage, her handsome face suffused and venomous. Gustave was standing obdurately still, a hulk of a man splashed by her invective.

I spoke to him.

"Gustave——"

He turned with a kind of dead stare.

"Gustave—I'm giving a lunch to-morrow. Can you spare me a minute?"

I think he saw the rescue in my eyes. He absconded from the fight. He followed me into the lounge, fumbling pathetically with a little notebook. But with a nod at him I made for the garden door and he followed me like a dog following someone with a sympathetic voice.

I got him away to a little quiet corner in the garden where three stiff chairs and an iron table stood under the thin shade of two pepper trees. I sat on the edge of the iron table, while he fumbled with his notebook, and could not look at me for shame.

"Monsieur's luncheon party——?"

Together we concocted some sort of imaginary menu, he scribbling in his little notebook, while I felt my compassion for him growing more articulate. I had my cigar case in my pocket, and I offered it to Gustave.

"Smoke——?"

"Monsieur is very kind——"

I saw his little eyes filmed with moisture. He lit one of my cigars, and handed me back the case with a little bow, and drew in a deep breath.

"Such is life, sir! Nine years ago, and moonlight on Lake Leman, and the lime trees smelling sweet——"

He hunched his shoulders, and puffed silently for some seconds.

"One should never marry a handsome girl with a temper. But I thought — that as I was a placid sort of fellow—— But then — I did not know that she had such a devil of a temper. It was unsupportable; it seemed to grow worse and worse. I do believe, sir, that some people are possessed. Even the child was terrified, and used to run away and hide, or wake up at night — screaming——"

He gave me a pleading, deprecating glance.

"I tried everything, sir. And then — she took to drinking. The storms became abominable. At last —for the sake of the child — I ran away, and took a place in Hungary. I used to send her money, while concealing my address. I promised to send her money regularly — if she would keep away. For she had become a bad woman — sir——"

He gulped smoke and emotion.

"But she found me out. She always does find me out. Six months of peace — and then. It's just the devil in her, fury for fury's sake. She comes and makes a scene. She tries to get hold of the child——"

I was sorry for the man, and yet — what could one say? I asked him why he had not divorced her, and he spread his hands and besought me to consider the life of a head-waiter.

"I go from place to place. I have to earn money. I have had no time to collect evidence. And some women are very cunning, sir. Always she contrives to put me in the wrong."

"But surely," I said, "it would save you money — in the end — if you divorced her."

He agreed.

"But she has taken so much money from me. I gave her money to try and keep her away from the child. Imagine, sir, how such a woman can poison the innocence of a child. And now — I shall have to disappear, give her the slip somehow. And everything was

very pleasant here and the season is just beginning, and I shall lose much money, and forfeit my contract."

He looked very miserable, and when he tucked the cigar between his lips it added an ironic touch to his unhappy face.

"Why go? Let her make a scene or two. She will get tired of it. And we respect you here — Gustave."

He gave me a grateful look.

"Thank you, monsieur. But the child ——? And the management might object —— Such scenes ——"

"Why not tell the Swiss woman to keep the child in the house. If you can trust her."

"She is a good woman, sir."

"Well — why not try it. Make a stand. If you allow yourself to be hunted from place to place — you give her the advantage."

"It is true," he said. "Perhaps I have been too much of a coward for the sake of the child."

It is possible that my sympathy and advice helped to harden his over-soft heart, for that evening at dinner he came and stood beside my table with an air of reinflated confidence. His white waistcoat had more of its natural civic dignity.

"I have decided to stay, sir."

"Good."

"The management has been very sympathetic. It seems, sir, that they appreciate my work here."

"We all do that, Gustave."

"And Madame Bozio is a tower of strength. Rosalie is not to leave the house or garden. Madame Bozio is a very determined and kind-hearted woman, sir. She says that she will be quite able to keep — her — out of the house."

I was glad. It seemed to me that Gustave had only to show a determined front to this fury, and she would soon tire of persecuting him. Obviously the thing for him to do was to refuse to send her money unless she promised to keep her distance. But Gustave was a sentimental creature. It may be that he still thought of Hortense as the girl he had known her when the moon shone on Lake Leman, and the lime trees were in bloom. He would rather run away than be brutally and firmly final.

But this domestic drama was to end in a manner beyond the

most fantastic imaginings. The climax was both shocking and tragic and grotesque. Gustave's wife remained in Tindaro; she lodged at some cheap little hotel; she appeared upon the Corso very flashily dressed; she frequented a certain café and a dancing cabaret that were more than a little dubious. It appeared that she made one or two attempts upon Madame Bozio's defences, and was stoutly repulsed.

I met the woman once or twice in the Corso. She was a bold, handsome creature, but if ever a woman had evil painted upon her face Gustave's wife had it. She was the sort of woman to make any decent man feel wholesomely afraid, and to run from her as from a devouring pestilence. The angry and lascivious eyes of her, and that red and greedy mouth were only too suggestive. I understood why poor Gustave was afraid of her, and especially so when he looked into the eyes of his child.

Every day she would walk to the gates of the Telamone. She would enter with an air of defiance, and parade up and down the private road between the hotel and the low stone wall that guarded the miniature precipice at the road's edge. She was waiting for the eternal chance of humiliating poor Gustave; and no doubt she enjoyed it.

But Gustave was shy. Only once again did she catch him in public, and that when he emerged for a moment to feed the grey goat with a handful of green stuff. I happened to witness the interview, for I was writing a letter at my bedroom window.

She came suddenly upon Gustave. I imagine she had been sitting upon one of the hotel seats that were screened by low hedges of Banksia rose. Apparently she objected to the goat, as she would have objected to anything for which Gustave had a liking; anyway, she rapped the creature over the head with her red sunshade, and the goat withdrew. But I saw the creature's light eyes fixed on the woman as she stood and abused her husband. She had a particularly unpleasant voice. I heard her asking Gustave for money.

But he stood his ground. In fact he ordered her out of the place, and having shown so much boldness, he retreated with dignity and deliberation. He disappeared from my view. His wife stood and watched him enter the hotel, and her handsome face expressed vindictive surprise, for I suppose this was the first time that he had

defied her. She looked up at the hotel windows as though the "Telamone" was Jericho, ready to fall flat when she sounded her trumpet.

She put up her red parasol. Gustave had ordered her to leave the hotel grounds, and like a defiant and malicious child she walked to the low wall and stood looking over. She was in no hurry; she would remain there just as long as she pleased, and depart at her leisure.

I had resumed the writing of my letter when I heard a pattering sound in the road below. I glanced up just in time to see the grey goat scampering with head down towards the woman standing by the parapet. She did not seem to hear the creature, and until the thing had happened I did not foresee that such a thing could happen. The creature's charge flung her headlong over the low wall.

Gustave must have been standing in the vestibule and watching his wife through the glass door, for as I started up from my chair I saw him rush out. Some fifty yards away a flight of steps led down to the lower terrace, and I saw him make for the steps. I, too, found myself in the roadway and running for the steps. A waiter and the concierge were following me.

But at the bottom of the flight of steps I turned and motioned them back. I had seen Gustave on his knees, raising the woman's figure.

I loitered for a moment and then went slowly along the path under the flickering shadows of the olive trees. Gustave was still kneeling there; he was in tears. He looked up at me pathetically.

"She is dead, sir."

He looked at the poor, painted face.

"After all — she was — the mother of my child, sir, and there was a time ——"

Sand Dunes

MILLARD MET ME AT THE STATION WITH HIS CAR, AND WE DROVE over to Milford through the green freshness of a summer evening. We had seen very little of each other during the last two years, but Millard was a man to whom the lapse of time made no difference. Friendship with him was a thing of the country: robust, steadfast, of slow growth, not given to change like the mere fickle friendships of a city.

"Well, how's life?" he asked.

It told him that I was tired, that the business world was like a pirate ship, and that I was taking a holiday.

"So you are beginning with us," he said; "that's good. Grace shall take you in hand. A long chair in the garden, eggs and milk, and a little mild tennis."

He smiled at me in the old way with his quiet blue eyes. There was no need for me to ask how life was treating him, for his brown and healthy happiness was as obvious as the sunset.

"How long can we keep you?"

"A week if that is not too long."

"Of course not. And what are you going to do afterwards?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Waiting for an inspiration!"

"Yes, that's about it."

The Millards had an old white house at the end of an old green garden. The place had an atmosphere: it was mellow, meditative, and very quiet; it was a house that did not stand; it reclined on a green carpet, surrounded by flowers and trees. You felt yourself relax directly you entered it. The rooms were long and not too brightly lit, full of soft colours and old wood. You saw flowers everywhere, and smelt them. Grace Millard lived in a world of flowers.

My first thought was: "Ah — I am going to be happy here."

And Grace Millard's welcoming brown eyes seemed to smile a silent acquiescence.

The whole house charmed me with the exception of my bedroom. I do not know what it was about the room that troubled me, for there was everything in it that a thoughtful woman could think of to make a bachelor comfortable. I saw it first just when twilight was beginning to fall. The light was cold, and even a blackbird's singing could not charm away the room's impression of sadness, chilliness. The furniture was of lightish oak, the curtains and bedspread purple, the carpet a soft grey. Millard, who was with me, asked if I should like a fire.

"My dear chap, no," I said; "I haven't quite forgotten that I am an old soldier."

The room depressed me. It filled me with a vague sense of unaccountable restlessness, which I explained by the sudden lost feeling that sometimes falls upon a hard-worked man when he has thrown off his harness, and finds himself with nothing to do.

I am a good sleeper, but I slept badly in that room.

"Well, had a good night?"

Millard was spooning out porridge.

"Oh, splendid," I said, lying cheerfully; "you have no confounded taxis in this corner of Surrey."

"Some people say the birds are rather noisy."

"That reminds me of the huntsman who had a grievance against 'them stinking violets'!"

We lounged, we motored, we played some not very strenuous tennis; I loafed in the hammock and smoked and read novels. I was out in the open air all day, and going in to my meals with immense zest, and yet my sleep in that purple and grey room was brittle and uncertain. The night would begin well, for I was healthily tired, but I woke each night about two, and, from that time onwards I dozed between intervals of restless wakefulness. I could not understand this broken sleep, and the feeling of expectancy that would come upon me suddenly. I would lie still and listen just as though I expected to hear some movement.

"Nerves!" I thought; "sudden change of habit. You are more tired than you suspected. Two years of worry and work, without a

proper holiday."

It is unusual for me to dream, but on the fourth night in the room I had a dream that was so vivid and so peculiar that I got up in the grey of the dawn and wrote down its strange details. I was most extraordinarily impressed by it. It made me feel as though I had been somewhere out of myself, and that my conscious self still felt a little bewildered and scared in the body to which it had returned.

I give the jottings as I scribbled them down:

It began with some war picture. I was lying with twenty or thirty men in more or less open ground. Germans rather above us and quite invisible.

Bombing. Rather crude and antiquated, more suggestive of one's ideas of the XVIII Century grenades. Not very serious; no one hurt. Much red flare and smoke, and pieces of metal falling about. One big piece — red hot — fell near me as I lay, a little to my right side, and I made the remark that it would have been unpleasant if that piece had fallen in the middle of my back. Men laughing and joking. No terror.

An interlude.

Billets in some foreign hotel, rather vague. A garden with a group of middle-aged women, English — I think.

Again, the earlier scene. All quiet. I am suddenly alone, rather high up, on sandy ground covered with tussocks of coarse grass. Sand dunes stretch away like the dunes around Nieuport, country I had known during the war. Silence; desolation.

Observed in series:

1. A hole rather like a rabbit hole, and lying in it a leather case with a strap. I did not touch it. Some vague suggestion of a booby trap.

2. I have moved on. I see a man's civilian overcoat, dark, neatly folded lengthwise with the lining outermost, laid on the sand.

3. I go further. On a rather terrace-like stretch of sand there are three or four hats scattered, Panama or canvas. One, a woman's, with a faded purple band. I am conscious of surprise. (I have heard it said that one never feels surprise in dreams. I did.)

4. Further on I see things scattered about: rugs, overcoats, one or two tennis rackets in presses! This struck me as very queer.

5. Lower down, another slight, sandy terrace. On it — very vividly — two travelling trunks, bleached rather white, with black leather bindings. A black hand-camera. Next to the camera a white wooden box about nine inches by six, dovetailed, with a sliding lid, sealed at one end with a strip of paper or a big label.

Flashing through my mind the thought: "Fugitives, Belgians, early in the war, luggage abandoned. How did they come? By car. How queer!"

6. I turn round and see behind me a low bank of sand and three figures, half sitting, half lying, muffled up, brown coloured, and swollen, looking as though they are asleep. Instinctively I know them to be dead. One man wears a cap with ear-flaps. The faces make me think of the brown, flat faces of rag dolls. They are almost featureless, and mummified. I see the small black dot of an eye on one face which turns out to be a fly.

7. I find myself looking over the bank and down into a hollow beyond. More figures, two or three, lying there and seeming to melt into the sand.

8. I look over my left shoulder. About half a mile away over the dunes a white Flemish house flashes up in the grey light, a rather tall and narrow house with a high white gable. A few dark figures are moving about the house.

9. I realize that I have wandered into a place of peril, perhaps behind the German posts or into no-man's-land close to their trenches. It is all strange. I seem to be standing on ground where no man has stood in open daylight since the beginning of the war. I am conscious of fear, terror, a desire to lie down and crawl somewhere.

10. I woke. The dawn is grey. I hear the sound of birds, and a cock pheasant calling.

I did not mention this dream to the Millards, for it seemed to me so morbid and so uncanny, that having put it on record, I thought it best to pigeon-hole it and to forget. Nor did I in any way connect it with the room or the house. I am not a psychic person. I am afraid my inclination would be to ask myself what I had had for dinner on the previous night. But I could not get away from the vividness of this dream; all its details were extraordinarily distinct; there seemed to be a sort of grim inevitableness running

through it. I found myself wondering who those people were who lay dead among the dunes; how had they come there, how had they died? Had I seen something that had actually happened quite a number of years ago?

The dream haunted me all that day, but that night I slept without a break. I found the memory much less vivid; it had begun to fade like the proof of a photograph that has been exposed to the light.

Millard came in from the garden as I wandered downstairs.

"Hallo, Toby; slept well?"

"Splendidly."

"There is a batch of letters for you somewhere. Where's that girl put them? Oh, there, on the sideboard."

Grace had not yet appeared, and Millard picked up the morning paper and glanced at the news while I went through my letters. The envelope of the last one carried a very familiar scrawl, Jamie Hamilton's big, virile hand. There was a foreign postage stamp in the right, upper corner, a Belgian stamp, and I stared at it for a moment with a feeling of surprise.

I opened the letter. The Hamiltons were staying at Ostend, Jamie, Norah, and the two children. Their hotel was the Leopold, very comfortable and all cleaned up, as he had put it. His suggestion was that I should run over and spend part of my holiday with them, and he promised me quite a pleasant time. "It is not half bad here, and not a little amusing. We bathe and play tennis, and I have been teaching the kids to swim. I have had one or two jaunts with Norah to some of the old places. Do you remember Nieuport, and that damned footbridge over the Yser? If family life won't bore you, come along and join us. Bring your clubs if you care to. We dance a bit. There are one or two quite nice girls here, and Norah is always hinting that you ought to get married."

All the time I was reading Jamie's letter I heard a voice inside me saying "You will go." And yet there was a part of me which did not want to go, for my queer dream had thrown a blight of fear and of horror over all that dune country.

"Do you remember Hamilton?" I asked Millard.

He glanced up from the cricket news.

"Rather. Awful good chap."

"He and his people are over at Ostend; they want me to join

them. I think I shall go."

I did go. I wired to Hamilton, asking him to book me a room at the Leopold, and I took the Dover-Ostend boat on a still and rather misty day when the sea was like a sheet of ground glass. I leant over the rail and watched the Belgian coast slide by, dim and rather strange with its pale dunes and little watering-places crouching at the edge of the sea. How familiar they were, St. Idesbald, Coxyde, Nieuport Bains, Westende! They had come to life again; but for me they were full of the strange, sad smell of the War, and as for the dunes, they were dominated by my dream. It insinuated itself into my consciousness, permeated it, coloured my impression of things, threw a ghostly blight over all that pale coast. I fought against the absurdity of this curious obsession.

"What rot! You are out for a holiday. Get rid of all this dyspeptic nonsense."

Hamilton and two very vital young people met me as I came off the boat, Pauline and Phœbe, one dark, the other red, both with long, slim, active legs and dancing eyes. Jamie was his lean, old, quizzical self. The haze had cleared, and Ostend warmed itself in the sunlight at the edge of the yellow sands and the blue of the sea. The atmosphere of my dream dispersed itself. Pauline held on to my left hand and asked me what I had done with my moustache. Phœbe, mischievous yet enigmatical, eddied along between me and Jamie and studied me with friendly intentness. When I smiled she smiled. There was no gloom here, no mystery, save the delightful mystery of childhood, eager and unspoilt.

"I hope you have brought your plus fours, old chap?"

"I have."

"Daddy — what are plus fours?"

"A certain form of knickerbockers, my dear."

"Mr. Mayne — I've got knickers on. What would they be?"

"Minus tens — I should say!" said her father.

Norah Hamilton was waiting for us on the terrace in front of the hotel. She always smiled at you as though you were some delightful yet whimsical sort of joke. She had been bathing, and her red hair looked massively rebellious.

"So glad you've come. I think Jamie was getting a little bored with the family."

"I have not seen any signs of it," I said.

My first impression of the Hotel Leopold was a pleasant one. It was clean and sunny, and not too large; it overlooked the sea; the concierge spoke English, and had a smile that would not be included in the bill. I found that Hamilton had engaged me a really excellent room on the second floor, and I realized that when lying in that comfortable bed with its deep mattress I should be sung to by the sea.

"I shall sleep like the dead here," I thought, as I began to unpack my baggage.

Dinner found me very ready to enjoy everything, and in a mood to talk nonsense to Norah and the two children. The *salle-à-manger* was fairly full, and the people were English, Belgian or French. "Quite a nice crowd," according to Jamie — "not too beastly rich. We have made quite a lot of friends." Our table was in the middle of the room, and they had given me a chair where I faced the windows and could look out over the sea. A series of small tables were ranged next to the windows, and they were the favoured places presented to the Leopold's longest stayers. I noticed a girl sitting by herself in a corner at one of these little tables. She was very dark and very pale, and not English. Her face interested me. It had a slightly bewildered look, and the eyes were sad.

Pauline and Phœbe were telling me the names of half the people in the room.

"That's Miss Ferguson."

"And that's Major Iles, the purple one."

"Ssh!" said Norah.

"It's all right," Jamie interposed, "Iles is attacking his soup."

"And that's Ma'mselle Merville. Isn't she pretty?"

"Which one?" I asked.

"She — in the corner."

"Don't point!" said Norah.

"I think she looks rather sad."

Hamilton frowned slightly.

"I don't blame her for that," he said.

The weather was all that a man could desire, and I spent the next two days romping with the Hamiltons, or rather, with Phœbe and Pauline. They took me in hand; they flicked and teased and

laughed the last shreds of worldly seriousness out of me, and I became an irresponsible creature who bathed and basked in the sun and ran races and put ten centime pieces on a flat stone for two young women to shy at. I felt better than I had felt for years, and I went in to my meals like a ploughboy.

But there was one serious note in that big, sunny room with its chattering voices and clatter of knives and forks. My eyes were always being drawn to the Belgian girl who sat alone in the corner. She seemed so much aloof; she never appeared to speak to anybody, though she would smile across to Phœbe and Pauline. I had a feeling that she was not only sad and lonely, but that the money was not too plentiful, and the longer I watched her the more I began to wonder what her history was.

"Why don't you ask Mademoiselle Merville to play with you?" I asked Pauline.

"Do — you — want to play with her?" retorted that disconcerting young woman.

The laugh was against me.

"She looks lonely," I said.

"But she won't play," Phœbe told me; "she's awfully sweet, but she doesn't seem able to play."

"Have you tried?"

"Of course we've tried; but Mumsie told us not to be nuisances. Do you find us nuisances, Uncle Mayne?"

"Oh, not at all," said I.

That evening in a corner of the smoking-room, while Jamie and I were snatching half an hour's peace with our pipes before the Leopold's weekly dance, I asked him about the pale girl in the corner.

"Do you know anything about her?"

He gave me a quizzical look.

"Interested?"

"A bit. She has such a lost look."

"Well, I do know something about her; half the hotel knows it. A most tragic thing happened to her early in the war."

"Over here?"

"No, she was in England at the time, learning the language. Her people lived at Brussels, quite wealthy people. The whole

family was wiped out."

"Good heavens! How?"

"That is the strange part of it; nobody knows."

"Nobody knows!"

"Sounds absurd, doesn't it? All that the girl ever discovered was that her people and another family left Brussels in two cars. It was at the time of the stampede. They were supposed to be making for this place or for the frontier along the coast."

He paused to relight his pipe, and in that moment of silence I had a most extraordinary feeling of inward attention. I seemed to know what he was going to tell me, that I knew more about it than he did.

"Well?" I said.

"They simply disappeared, vanished. They were never heard of again."

"What — the two families?"

"Yes. They and their cars and their luggage."

"It sounds impossible. But what is the theory?"

"There is no theory. The only thing I can think of is that they fell in somewhere with some German scouting party, some particularly unpleasant party. Oh well, the men had had drink. All sorts of things happened. We were told so, weren't we? Men were apt to be savages."

"You mean — they were butchered?"

"Perhaps."

"But surely ——?"

"Not a trace. And it turned out to be more than a mere tragedy of the affections. The girl lost everything — or nearly everything. Her father took some documents with him. I don't know anything about the Belgian law, but apparently another side of the family came in for the property. There had been bad feeling, a sort of feud; anyhow, with certain documents missing, the other crowd got all the estate."

I said nothing for a moment; I was too conscious of a tense feeling of excitement.

"I wish you could introduce me to Mademoiselle Merville."

"Of course I will."

"To-night?"

"I'll try. I warn you — she is rather elusive."

We knocked out our pipes and went into the lounge. The orchestra had begun to play in the room where the dance was held, and Pauline and Phœbe, who were on the jig with their small feet, made a rush at me.

"Oh, Uncle Mayne, do come and dance with us."

"Mumsie says we may stay up for an hour."

Hamilton suppressed them, but quite gently.

"You run along — you two — and begin. You haven't hired Uncle Mayne for the fortnight."

He had seen Mademoiselle Merville sitting alone in a corner of the lounge, and he went across, bowed, and spoke to her. She looked startled; she glanced at me. For a moment I thought that she was going to refuse, and then she smiled faintly, and a made a slight movement of the head. Hamilton beckoned, and I crossed over.

"Mr. Richard Mayne — Mademoiselle Lucie Merville."

Hamilton left us and I sat down beside her. She was in black, and it emphasized her pallor and the darkness of her eyes. They were very troubled eyes, and they made me think of her as someone who had never quite recovered from some shock, and who was still bewildered by it. I felt that she was a woman who had to be spoken to very gently. She left the conversation to me, and she listened as though the real Lucie was somewhere far away. I talked about Ostend, the life here, the children.

Her eyes brightened when I brought in Phœbe and Pauline.

"They are dears," she said.

She spoke English very well, and it gave me an opening.

"You were at school in England, were you not?"

"Yes."

"You must have lived in England quite a long while."

She gave me a queer and almost frightened look.

"Yes."

"During the war?"

For a moment I thought that I had touched with too great a boldness on a matter that was painful to her. Her eyes darkened; I had a feeling that she was about to make some excuse and escape.

"Perhaps you do not care to talk of the war. I am sorry."

There must have been some sympathy between us, and perhaps she felt that subtle something, an attraction that drew us together.

"People were very kind to me in England. I shall never forget."

"Oh, well," I said; "the war drew us all together. Don't talk about it if you do not wish to."

"I think that depends."

"You made friends in England?"

"Yes."

"Do you ever go over?"

"No."

There was a pause. We looked at each other rather like two shy children.

"What part of England did you stay in?"

"I spent most of my time in Surrey."

"Surrey!"

"Yes, near a little village called Milford. Some people were very good to me there."

I felt something flash in my brain.

"Not the Millards?" I said.

I saw the surprise in her eyes.

"Why — yes; how did you know?"

"I did not know. But I have just been staying with them. They are very old friends of mine."

We were silent a moment. A faint smile seemed to be playing about her mouth; her thoughts had gone back.

"They were very dear people; they were very kind to me. They gave me a home when I was in very great trouble. It was such a peaceful house, so good."

It came into my mind that there was one question I wanted to ask her.

"Tell me, did you have that quaint little room with the window looking down over the lawn to the woods?"

Again she looked surprised.

"Yes. It had purple curtains and a greyish carpet and early in the morning you heard the birds singing."

I was amazed. She had slept in that room in which I had dreamed my dream, and as I realised it and the almost frightening significance of it I became aware of thoughts that were uncanny.

What if her dead had been trying to communicate with her and had failed, while I — a casual stranger — had dreamed of the thing — seen it — years after it had happened. I remembered the curious way in which the room had affected me.

"A most queer coincidence," I said, "that you and I should meet here."

I told her nothing of my dream, or hinted at my sudden conjecturing as to whether our meeting in this Ostend hotel was not more than a coincidence. It seemed to me that I — a tired and overworked business man — had had an attack of clairvoyance, but what was more suggestive was my realization of what I had to do. The dune country lay out there, and my dream seemed more vivid than ever. Was it possible that I might find some wild spot in the dunes where my dream would fit like a picture into its frame?

I led the talk away to other things, but before I went to bed that night I got hold of Jamie Hamilton, and told him the whole tale. I could see that he was mildly incredulous, but that at the same time he was quite ready to join in something that had the lure of an adventure.

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Tramp the dune country."

"What, all the way from here to Dunkirk?"

"Not so far as that. They would not have got beyond Nieuport, you know."

"My dear chap!" he said, looking at me as though he thought that I had tumbled too easily into a pit of superstitious foolishness.

"Of course you need not come."

"Oh, I'll come. I've got an inquiring mind. But I suppose you have said nothing to the girl?"

"Not a word. It would be rather cruel unless I had some proof to give her."

So Hamilton and I set out next morning to explore the country of the dunes, pretending that we intended to visit some of the old places we had known during the war. We took our lunch with us, and engaged a car to run us out and wait for us. It was a blazing day, with the sea like a mirror and the sand like pale brass, and anyone who has tried to march over loose, sun-warmed sand will tell you that it can be an exhausting and exasperating form of

exercise. And, of course, we found nothing that we could point to or identify. One sand dune is much like another, and we tramped that tossed and desolate land-sea, getting very hot and tired, and towards the end of the day Hamilton grew slightly tense and facetious. He had sweated all the sense of adventure out of his long, lean body. Our shoes were full of sand. The glare of the heat of it beat up into our faces.

"Say, old thing, what about getting home for a drink and a bathe?"

I felt disgruntled and a little touchy.

"Yes, it's the wrong atmosphere."

"It's a damned hot one, anyway. The next time you dream a dream, Toby, I'd insist on having a notice board put up."

We picked up the car and drove back to Ostend, where Jamie went to cool himself in the sea, while I sat in my bedroom examining a map that I had brought. "System is the thing," I reflected. "I ought to go over the ground systematically, bit by bit. I ought to get the feel of the place, and to do that I must go alone."

I spent an hour that evening talking to Lucie Merville, feeling more and more attracted by her, and ignoring Hamilton's suggestion that I should come and play bridge. He was wilfully and wickedly tactless in pretending that I was needed to make up a four. I kept my chair beside Lucie Merville. I had a feeling that she liked me, that she felt at ease with me, and I wanted her to like me. In fact I began to suspect that I wanted much more than that. She appealed to me, as a certain particular woman appeals to a certain man, not for any tangible and purely physical reason, but because there seemed to be some mysterious vibration that we shared. Love is like life; you can analyse its characteristics, but you cannot create it.

We talked about the Millards, and the next day I was out again among the dunes, tramping, watching, trying to discover some familiar undulations, some stretch of sand that might make me feel that I had seen it before. But the dunes baffled me, and after three consecutive days of such sand-slogging, I was thoroughly discouraged and tempted to give it up. Hamilton's quizzical face met me at the dinner-table each evening, and the family was beginning to wonder what morose sort of creature I must be to disappear daily

with my lunch stowed away in an old haversack.

"Mayne goes botanizing," said Hamilton, with a wicked look; "you did not know he was a botanist, did you?"

I felt tired and exasperated, but an hour's talk with Lucie Merville rested me and put me in such a happy temper that I saw myself going out again on the morrow on the same wild quest. I went. The weather had changed. The sky and the sea were overcast, and I felt that rain was coming on the wings of the west wind. Wayward gleams of pale sunlight touched the dunes, and when my chauffeur put me down and I wandered away towards the Yser I had a curious feeling of being in familiar country. The whole atmosphere had changed. I seemed to be re-entering the atmosphere of my dream, for I remembered the clouds, the pale sunlight, the grey blue distances of approaching rain.

I wandered about among the sandhills; but, in spite of my strange feeling of expectancy, I found nothing that could guide me. The sky grew more solidly grey. I turned a little towards the sea and began to climb a sort of hummocky ridge which spread out in an undulating plateau. I stood there looking over the tumbled landscape, and suddenly — something happened.

I was looking over my left shoulder, and I saw something white flash up in the near distance. It was a tall and rather narrow house with a white gable, lit by a passing gleam of sunlight. It was the house that I had seen in my dream.

I stood and stared. There were one or two figures moving about the house.

I felt a shiver pass down my spine; my knees were tremulous; I looked about me with a sense of awe and of fear.

Within three yards of me rose a bank of sand. It undulated slightly, showed little hummocks and hollows. I turned to the right. Yes; there was a sort of sandy terrace here of pale, crisp sand.

Yes; but there was nothing else to be seen.

And then I remembered that in this dune country the sand was blown by the wind; it collected against solid objects and covered them.

My sense of fear passed into action. I bent down and began to scrape at one of the hummocks on the sloping bank. I must have scraped away six inches of sand when my fingers touched some-

thing hard.

I drew up and back. I stared. I was sweating, and the feeling of fear had returned.

Then, I knelt down and made myself go on with the job. A black thing came into view. It was a man's boot, but a man's boot by itself had no significance. It was the thing that the boot covered that mattered.

I knelt, staring at two white sticks that disappeared into the top of the boot. They were the two shinbones of a skeleton.

The First Wrinkle

THE DAILY DETAILS OF LIFE HAD BEGUN TO BORE WILTON CARR. At half-past four his secretary brought in his tea — China tea and buttered toast. She seated herself in the chair on the other side of his desk, her shorthand pad ready, her pince-nez tilted attentively. She, too, was a machine — an automaton that went through the same actions at the same hour each day. Her life never seemed to vary; it was as plain and as uninteresting and as obvious as her face.

"No letters to-night, Miss Sims."

She was surprised, and her surprise amazed him. He knew that for the last ten years he had dictated his letters to her while he was drinking his tea. Hundreds of thousands of letters — dull letters that he had come to associate with the glimmer of her pince-nez and her thin and dusty face!

"No letters, sir?"

There seemed to be some hitch in the machinery of life. She knew that there were a dozen letters that were waiting to be answered, and that Wilton Carr's whole career has preached punctuality, patience, routine. There had been days when she could have screamed as her pencil jabbed its way across the paper. Had he ever suspected? Did this man of forty know what it was to have to live two lives?

She rose, and the telephone on his desk twittered.

"Hold on," he said.

She waited, watching his face, vaguely aware of a change in it that she could not describe. There were little, irritable wrinkles on his forehead and round his eyes. She knew how she felt and how she looked when she was irritable with fatigue and hunger, and Wilton Carr's face made her wonder whether he was hungry, and if so — for what?

He was speaking into the telephone.

"What? Oh, it's Rigby & Harden again, is it? Tell them to go to hell!"

She saw his nostrils twitching, and the impatience in his eyes.

"Yes — that's what I said. Wait, I'll send them a letter. I'm tired of their slipping ways."

He rang off, gulped a mouthful of tea, and glanced at Miss Sims.

"Take this down, please."

It was the most uncharacteristic letter of his that she had ever recorded — abrupt and frank to the point of violence. But was it so uncharacteristic? She had read somewhere that at forty a man's suppressed self is apt to erupt.

"That's all." Ten minutes later he went out, and Miss Sims caught the 5.33 from Waterloo.

It was one of those soft, pearl-grey November afternoons — the western sky reddening as for a carnival. Carr found himself walking down Regent Street with a queer sense of having broken away from some boring tradition, a routine that had begun to be exasperating. He felt exhilarated, restless, suddenly alive to new sensations, new impressions. A lighted window attracted him, and he turned aside to look at a glowing model of Monte Carlo bathed in improvised sunlight — brilliant, youthful, and alluring.

Two girls in fur coats were standing beside him, and one of them brushed against his sleeve. The faint perfume of her clothes suggested the warm and exotic south, and he had a glimpse of a little, pale, provoking face with red lips and sidelong eyes.

"I should like a month down there."

"Have you been?" twittered the other voice.

"I had some luck last year."

Carr walked on with a feeling that life was slipping past him. He saw himself growing grey in the dull but comfortable room that housed the brain of the firm of Ellerby and Carr, while life went past him like a carnival procession, a procession in which he had no place. These girls — these richly dressed and sensuous women, these young men who idled along with eyes that were the eyes of men who hunted! The lights, the jazz-roll of the traffic, the blazing windows, the rush of humanity, the passion of life hurrying to spend itself, the intoxications, the adventures! Had he not missed it all — he — who was on the edge of growing old?

The ego in him uttered a cry of desire and of pain.

The lights and the life-vortex of Piccadilly Circus held him bemused.

He looked at his watch.

Was he going to catch the 6.4 at Euston?

No!

He walked on like a stranger in a strange city, lacking any definite object, hardly noticing whither he went. His newly-revolted body was controlled by ancient, immemorial instincts. He was aware of the lights, the colours, the luxury of the shop-windows, the interminable traffic, the women and girls who hurried or loitered past him, the *va et vient* of it all. He diverged up a side-street and saw opalescent darkness, a spacious quiet, the lights of a few taxis, trees. He was in Darlington Square. A portico outlined by a string-course of electric lights attracted his attention. There were letters of light on the cornice.

"THE DARLINGTON ROOMS:
DANCING."

He paused and stood reading a poster.

"LESSONS:
FOX-TROT — WALTZ — TANGO."

"How long is it since I danced?" said a voice from the depths of him.

A moment later he was speaking to the commissionaire who had opened one of the swing doors.

"Can I have lessons here?"

"Upstairs, sir; first door on the right."

Wilton Carr went up. He found himself in a sort of lounge, and talking to a fair-haired young woman behind a long desk and an array of ledgers. The sound of a piano came from the next room. Two settees stood at right angles to the fire-place, and they were occupied by three young women in black dresses, an Italian and a Frenchman. The upholstery of the place struck Carr as being vaguely familiar — perhaps because the Darlington Rooms had

been decorated and furnished by the firm of Ellerby & Carr.

"Can I have a lesson, now?"

"It's rather late."

The fair-haired girl glanced at the clock over the door, and then at the three instructresses.

"There is half an hour. Pepita?"

One of the young women got up with an air of protesting languor. She was a dark girl with a snake's head of black hair, a brilliant pallor, and large soft eyes. Her nose was short, audacious, predatory. She had a full, red mouth, a mouth that made Carr think of an unfolding flower.

"This gentleman wants a lesson."

The girl looked at Carr and her gaze puzzled him. It was a quick, comprehensive, critical stare, a glance that summed him up from spats to collar and made an estimate of his social state. Yet this protected and domesticated male thought what beautiful and gentle eyes she had! And she looked tired!

"Half an hour. Will you come with me, sir."

She had pronounced in his favour, perhaps because she had secured the softness of the man. He had an opulent look, and was well-groomed and ruddy. Men of forty are prone to be sentimental and generous.

Carr took off his overcoat, and followed Pepita into the dancing-room.

He began by being absurdly clumsy and self-conscious, for there was something about Pepita that confused his stolid, normal self. She made him feel absurdly boyish and sentimental. She looked tired and his clumsiness seemed brutal. He kept kicking her feet.

"I'm awfully sorry! You ought not to be dragging an idiotic bulk like me round the room."

"Why not?"

"You are tired."

"I'm used to it. I'm paid to get tired."

In spite of her name she spoke very good English, having been born in Lewisham and christened Florence Smith. Her Spanish-South American atmosphere was part of her art.

Carr felt ashamed of himself — ashamed of all men who made this graceful creature the slave of their elephantic ambitions.

"Look here, let's sit out for five minutes."

"We are not allowed to sit out—except for the two minutes between each dance."

"And you do this all day?"

"From ten till six."

"What a shame!"

She looked at him curiously. Carr was quite sober, and yet something seemed to have gone to his head and made him furiously sympathetic. The experience was not new to her: she had met it most often in boys, and men over forty. One of the two-minute intervals had arrived, and they sat on a blue and yellow settee and smoked Carr's cigarettes. There were only two other couples in the room. The pianist, a Russian with a mop of tow-coloured hair, watched Pepita with cynical interest.

"I am afraid I am ruining your shoes."

She smiled suddenly at him with her large soft eyes.

"Shoes are rather precious—now. And I have to begin again at half-past eight."

"What, to-night?"

"Yes; we have to dance with some of the men at the evening dances. Sometimes I'm so tired at six o'clock that I can't eat any dinner."

Carr's sentimentality was shocked. The pianist began to pound out a waltz, and Pepita jumped up.

"Come along."

"But it seems so confoundedly hard on you."

"Oh, I never give in," and she laughed intimately and confidingly in his face.

Carr stammered through the waltz. He was not thinking of his feet or of her instructions—but of a soft-eyed, weary girl who seemed so full of pluck and resolution.

"I say," he ventured, "don't think me impertinent, but what you want is a rest, a little wine, and a good dinner."

She smiled up at him.

"I get a shilling an hour for pushing you round. That doesn't provide——"

He plunged.

"Look here, I'm dining in town at seven. Will you do me the

honour——?"

She knew her man, and she looked him straight in the eyes. "Thank you—but I am not that sort of girl."

Carr blushed like a boy.

"My dear girl—I did not mean that! I'm not a cad. Now—you will have to let me prove it——"

Of course—she allowed him to prove it—and they dined at Carbonaro's, and drank Bollinger 1910. Pepita found out quite a lot about Wilton Carr: that he was Carr of Ellerby & Carr, that he was married, that he had a big place at Melfont. But, about Pepita, Carr learnt nothing.

He left her in the vestibule of the Darlington Rooms, took a taxi to Euston, and travelled down to Melfont by the 9.52. The Melfont church clock was striking eleven when he walked up the drive to his old Georgian house among its cedars, conscious of a vivid freshness in his life, a little guilty tremor under the starlit sky. He let himself into the house, hung up his hat and coat, and opened the door of the drawing-room. Lucy was there, curled up in a big chair in front of the fire.

He had heard that she would be in bed.

"Sorry I'm late, dear. I was kept in town—business."

Then he realized with a shock of emotion that it was the first conscious lie that he had ever told her. Lucy was not a woman who provoked deceit. Repose was her great charm, restfulness, a kind of wise and quiet candour. She had one of those fair, tranquil, and slightly indolent faces, blue eyes set well apart, a mass of warm brown hair, a comely figure.

"You must be tired."

She looked up at him unsuspiciously, and Carr—the infatuated—thought her phlegmatic—even a little stupid. He was so accustomed to Lucy. She had made his life very easy and very comfortable, and it never occurred to him that this wife of his had had her moments of restlessness, dreams that had never come true.

"We are getting too much business," he said, walking to a table where whisky, a syphon, and glasses were ready. He poured himself out a drink. The details of life were always in order in this house that Lucy managed, and he had come to accept the smoothness of it all as a man expects a comfortable bed.

She leant forward and stared at the fire.

"Too much business! Do you know, Will, there are times when I almost wish that we were poor."

"Good lord!" he exclaimed, the commercial man in him naïvely shocked.

She laughed.

"We are so successful. Sometimes it may be a very terrible thing to be too successful. I'd like to go blackberrying."

"My dear girl," he said pompously, "one's commercial responsibilities are very serious things."

She looked at him with veiled pity and tenderness.

"I know. Some people wonder whether they are worth while."

"Of course they are worth while. Progress, civilization. You can't get away from progress."

"Yes, progress," she said a little sadly; "and then — at the end of it — you find ——"

"Come along to bed, dear."

She was making him uncomfortable, challenging him to think, and your middle-class Englishman hates nothing so much as thinking. It is like putting on a suit of clothes that have not been cut by his orthodox and pet tailor.

But what the devil did she mean? Progress! And at the end of it — you find — what?

Then she completed the sentence he had interrupted: "You may find that you have left the most important thing behind; and sometimes it is too late to go back for it."

That was the whole secret of Wilton Carr's sudden and violent dissatisfaction with life, this sudden feverishness, this impulse towards reckless adventure.

During the next three weeks Carr went regularly to the Darlington Rooms. He was infatuated, but in a sentimental and benignant fashion. He told himself that he felt a fatherly interest in Pepita — which is the decent man's excuse for not calling himself a cad. Carr was not a cad.

He resembled, perhaps, a half-blind man groping towards a light, towards beauty, romance, the dawn on the hills, the intangible loveliness and mystery of life. He was more innocent than any boy. He thought that he had discovered beauty and mystery in this

Pepita who taught dancing.

She understood that he was not the ordinary coarse male out upon adventure. There were possibilities in Wilton Carr, and she set out to develop them.

He had begun to give her presents, the extravagantly generous presents of a lover. She scolded him, and ordered him not to waste his money.

"Money!" he said, "—oh—I have too much money."

She had no doubts as to his financial solidity. All sorts of men came to the Darlington Rooms, and one of Pepita's pupils was a little stockbroker whose infatuation was almost as fatherly as Carr's. She told him that she dabbled in shares and fancied "Industrials." And what about Ellerby & Carr's new issue?

"Sound stuff," said her adviser; "it's the richest 'house' of its kind in London."

She had no intention of buying "Billy's" shares, but she had serious thoughts of—Billy. Five years of rag-time life had left Pepita with few illusions, and a passion for respectability and a solid future. She wanted security, a comfortable house, a car, winters at Monte Carlo, a soft and easy-going husband. Carr was the sort of man for whom she had been watching—but then Carr was married. If she could persuade him to jump over the cliff with her—a great passion might carry her to ultimate prosperity.

"Oh, how I loathe this life, Billy."

They were dining at Carbonaro's, and she looked at him with her large, tragic eyes. She had no pity for the other woman, that dull and dowdy somebody who lived down at Melfont.

"It's rotten. I meet rotten men, rotten people. And there's no escape for a girl like me."

"You are ambitious, Pepita?"

"Ambitious! Not a bit. I should like to go right away and see beautiful scenery and pictures and all that. And then I should like to settle down in a sweet old home with the one dear man. And children——"

Carr thought he saw a sacred light in her eyes when she uttered the words: "children."

"Perhaps you have never met the right man."

She traced invisible patterns on the table-cloth with a tragic

forefinger.

"I don't know. Sometimes one meets him too late."

And then she pushed her chair back and sent the waiter for her cloak.

"What's the use? I'm tired; I seem to have got to the end of things. Take me home, Billy, I shall go to bed."

He walked back with her to the seedy house in a seedy street where she had a room, and the apparent pathos of her life filled Carr with reckless and compassionate dreams. This beautiful body, this tired soul, in prison! He felt that he loved her as he had loved no other woman.

They said good-bye at the doorway.

"Good night — dear."

"Billy — do take me out to-morrow. I feel I shall do something desperate unless someone cares."

He bent over her as he held her hand.

"There is someone who cares," he said; "someone who can't help caring."

For the next two days Wilton Carr hesitated on the edge of the precipice. He stood there, seeing strange and wonderful distances, blue skies, mountains, exotic lands, made for a lover's pilgrimage. He imagined Pepita's kisses, the kisses of that flower-like mouth.

Miss Sims thought him ill — on the edge of a nervous breakdown. He was extraordinarily restless, and quite unable to concentrate upon the details of his business. On the Tuesday before Christmas week, he went out at half-past three, leaving a dozen letters undealt with. A casual acquaintance saw him strolling along Piccadilly in the direction of Bond Street.

He wanted to buy Pepita a pearl necklace, and he paused outside a jeweller's window. In ten days it would be Christmas, and quite suddenly he remembered that he had not bought Lucy's present. He stood there shocked, and ashamed. The buying of his wife's Christmas present had always been a happy and almost romantic event with him.

But — damn it — how could he buy her a present? It would be like giving Lucy some treacherous gift that was poisoned. Wilton Carr walked on.

He dined with Pepita, made up his mind that there could be

only one ending to the affair, and reached Melfont soon after ten.

He found Lucy reading in front of the fire, and somehow her complete and unsuspecting happiness shocked him. She looked so secure, so surely and innocently anchored in the quiet waters of their home. And he was going to inflict upon her the greatest humiliation that a man can lay upon a woman. Was it possible?

He poured himself out a drink, keeping his back turned to his wife.

"I'll settle the house on her," he thought, "and three thousand a year. I rather wish——"

Then he heard her speaking.

"Will, I want you to take me to see a play."

He turned, slowly.

"A play! What play?"

"That thing of Barrie's——"

He came and sat by the fire.

"What sort of a play is it? I'm not much of a theatre-goer."

"But you will take me? I think you will like it. We don't go out much."

"Do you want to go out—more?"

"I'm still young," she said gently.

Some unexplainable impulse stirred in Carr.

"All right," he said; "what about to-morrow evening? I dare say I can get tickets."

He was not looking at her face.

"Thank you, Will. I can come up and dine with you."

Carr managed to get seats in the dress-circle, and Lucy called for him at Ellerby & Carr's about half-past six. He had had a difficult day with Miss Sims, and several rather exasperating business details to deal with, and he was tired. He sat back in his chair, conscious of a sense of relief on finding himself surprised by the happy and restful comeliness of his wife. She was wearing her furs, and as she sat by the fire in Carr's big room, the firelight made little gleams upon her hair. She seemed to have brought a warm and subtly perfumed atmosphere with her into the room, a serenity that was like the serenity of a beautiful garden.

She looked extraordinarily handsome, and she was not restless like Pepita.

"You look tired, Will."

"Oh, a bit fagged. I have got seats all right. Where shall we dine?"

"Let's go to one of our little old places."

They went.

That dinner was a very pleasant affair, and Carr caught other men looking admiringly at his wife. The play followed. Carr was the sort of Englishman who always resented the idea that literary and dramatic art were to be taken seriously, but this play of Barrie's was peculiarly apposite, and carried to Carr a vivid and almost prophetic appeal. It moved him most strangely. During the last interval he went out and walked up and down the foyer with a feeling that something was about to happen to him, something that he could not foresee.

He returned, and sat in the dim light beside his wife. She was leaning forward slightly, absorbed, unconscious of his presence, and Carr kept glancing at her with secret curiosity. Was it possible that they were strangers to each other — utter strangers?

The curtain descended for the last time; the lights were up, lights that seemed particularly brilliant. Lucy was still sitting beside him with an expression of rapt and mysterious serenity, as though the beautiful and human suggestiveness of the play held her happily enthralled.

And then Wilton Carr saw something that was new to him, something that he had never noticed before, just — a faint wrinkle — the first wrinkle on his wife's face. She was smiling at her own thoughts, and this faint line showed where her cheek and lower eye-lid met. Carr felt a sudden thickness in his throat. The whole human truth flashed on him. This woman was happy with a happiness that was in his keeping, and he had been about to push this happiness of his over the cliff and on to the rocks below. For years she had been his mate, this woman who loved him. Even that little wrinkle was part of their comradeship. It was time's seal upon his love for her.

"Good God!" he thought, "what have I been doing?"

An immense and penitent tenderness rushed over him. He was helping his wife into her fur coat. Purposely, caressingly he touched her cheek, and she turned with a quick smile, her eyes meeting

his. And what dear eyes they were, so trustful, so deep with those sacred memories that he had almost sacrificed to a little vampire of five-and-twenty!

"What a fool!" he said to himself; "please God she'll never guess."

It was late when they reached home, but a bright fire was still burning in the drawing-room. Carr helped Lucy off with her furs, and then — impulsively — he caught her and held her close.

"Dear, I want to kiss you — just there."

He kissed the place where he had seen the wrinkle, and she smiled happily, tenderly.

"Why — just there?"

"Oh, a whim of mine. I've never seen you looking so young."

He led her to the sofa, and they sat down before the fire.

"Lucy, I have been thinking over what you said the other day."

"What was that?"

"That we are in such a hurry these days that we forget the things that matter, and sometimes it's too late to go back and find them. My life has been just business — and more business. Oh, damn the business!"

He kissed her with sudden contrite playfulness.

"Hang it, I'm going to be a boy again. Can you be ready in three days?"

"Ready? What for?"

"A holiday. You will have to come up to town and have your passport photo taken to-morrow morning. I'm seeing about tickets and an hotel. We'll stop a day or two in Paris. Can you manage it?"

"Will!"

She snuggled up to him like a surprised and delighted child.

"Where are we going?"

"The South of France, Italy. I'll leave Parsons in charge. The business can rip for six months."

"What a dear you are," she said.

Carr stared at the fire.

"I was letting my life dry up, Lucy. We'll buy your Christmas present somewhere down in the sunshine."

Shipwreck and a Shrew

LIKE A PIECE OF WHITE PULP, AND YET A LIVE THING THAT STILL HAD the will to live, Bob Gretton floundered through the surf and dug his fingers and toes into the sand. Three times he was caught by the wash of a wave and sucked back like a cat sliding down a roof. The last crawl took him clear of the claws of the sea, and he lay on his face on the sand and was sick.

"My God——!"

It had all happened with such catastrophic suddenness. A little more than an hour ago they had been sitting at dinner under the *Sappho's* awning, Gretton, Enderby, Hanson, Helen Glaber, Mildred, and Captain Dick. The day had been rather sultry and very still, too oppressive even for that irrepressible egoist, Helen Glaber, who had talked of exploring this derelict little island with its mountain, its palm groves, and its scrub. Gretton could remember Dick's silence, his restlessness, his worried watching of the horizon. They had been ready to laugh at him when he had ordered the engineer to get up steam.

"Have another peg, Dick!"

Half an hour later the cyclone had caught them, and the *Sappho* had turned turtle. Gretton could still hear Mildred Arkell's cry when she had been swept away from him in that struggle on the top of the companion-way. She had been tossed into that black hell of boiling water, and in that moment Gretton had realised that he loved her.

He squirmed on the sand in an anguish of physical exhaustion. The great waves had knocked the breath out of his body, bruised him, trodden him into the sand. He was one great wet ache—dazed, half-drowned—and yet at the back of the mere physical anguish was that other anguish, the face of a drowned girl and her floating hair.

Presently he got up on his hands and knees and looked about

him like a wounded animal. A patch of tawny light still showed in the west, the glare of a furnace seen through smoke. A furious wind was blowing, and scud flew over him as he crawled up the beach. He was conscious of the vast, black movement of the sea behind him, and ahead a huge swaying cloud that seemed mysteriously anchored to the ground. As Gretton neared it, pushing his way in through the quaking bushes, he realized that this swaying cloud was a palm grove, a shrieking mass of frightened trees, their foliage blown all one way — like hair.

The sound of the sea and of the wind in the palms were so overwhelming that he lay down under the bushes with a feeling of helplessness. It seemed like the end of the world, and he a wet, bruised, half-naked thing caught in the cataclysm, a mere bit of white slime spilt on a rock. The uproar bewildered him. He curled himself up under the bushes, and shivered, like the last man left alive in a doomed world.

Presently the wind died away almost as suddenly as it had come. The palms ceased to shriek; they stood still — astonished, conscious of mockery. The stars came out, soft and ironical. There was still the labouring of the sea — a sense of savage distress down yonder — but the face of the night was the calm face of an uncaring god.

Gretton sat up. Something revived in him. The conscious man in him felt challenged.

And then he began to curse. The passionate and frightened child that is in all of us sent Gretton running wild through the scrub and down to the pale sands. He was in a panic of loneliness. He limped along the sands, shouting and waving his arms like a man gone mad.

"Hanson, Dick, Mildred! Is anyone alive? Am I all alone on this damned island?"

He called them by name, throwing his puny voice against the surge of the sea, vaguely conscious of the absurdity of this raving.

"You're not dead, all of you! Can't you hear me shouting? It's Gretton, Bob Gretton."

Presently calmness came to him as it had come to the island. He stood very still on the sands, watching the waves rolling in and out of the darkness.

"I'm all alone here," said an inward voice; "they are dead, all

of them. What's the use; what's the use?"

He went back to the palm grove and sat down in the darkness at the foot of a tree. His brain seemed to grow clear like the sky. It was full of pictures, the memories of the last few days. He saw the *Sappho's* deck under the awning, the comfortable chairs, the flat sea, the blue sky. He saw Helen Glaber's hard, sunburnt face, with its beaked nose, its ruff of sandy hair, its flashing smile that came and went like the flash of a lighthouse. He saw the men, Hanson big and easy; Enderby droll and thin. He saw Mildred Arkell — shy, gentle, always a little afraid — watching the Glaber woman, whose slave she was.

He seemed to hear Helen Glaber giving the girl her orders in that serene and insolent voice of hers: "Fetch me that book." "I want a cushion."

Something raged in Gretton. He shouted aloud: "Damn her, damn her! Only yesterday she made Mildred cry."

He was absurdly moved by the thought of it, and by the recollection of what had happened. He had been talking to Mildred by the "gig"; he realized now that he had been making love to her; and suddenly Helen Glaber had sailed in. He could see her hard, blue eyes and the flash of her teeth in her sunburnt face.

"Mildred, I pay you to darn my stockings."

Yes, just that; just those silly, brutal words. His cabin was next to the Glaber woman's. He had sat on his bunk before dinner and listened to that metallic voice uttering venomous things that only a woman can say to another. Mildred had wept.

"But I can't help it! If he——"

"I do not choose that you should cheapen yourself with any fool who wants to be amused."

And again — Gretton raged. For weeks he had been incensed by the vast egotism of the woman, her cruelty, her cleverness, her determination to be first. Someone had nicknamed her "Mrs. One-better." She could not endure competition. If you differed from her she was insulted. If you agreed with her she thought you a fool.

"Curse her," he thought; "I wish I had her alone on this island! She made that girl's life a hell."

And then he burst out laughing, ironical laughter that laughed at itself.

"But what am I shouting about? The sea has washed the tears out of that child's eyes."

Emotion exhausts itself, and Gretton fell asleep, lying curled up in a little sandy hollow at the foot of the tree. Creeping things crawled over him, and he did not feel them. The stars grew pale and the sea flattened itself towards a tropical calm.

The dawn was coming up when Gretton woke. He sat up, stiff and bewildered, staring at the ragged fringe of white "duck" where one trouser leg had been torn off below the knee. He looked at the tops of the palms still black against a green-blue sky, at the sun domed on the horizon, at the shadowy scrub and the amber sand. It was very beautiful, but its beauty seemed evil, for he was alone.

Almost before Gretton was aware of it, the physical part of him had taken control, pushing his spiritual nausea aside. He was hungry, almost savagely hungry. He scrambled up. His clothes had dried on him in the night, and he was naïvely surprised to find that he was still wearing his light canvas shoes. But food! Something with which to stuff that emptiness inside him! He knew that there was water on the island. And then he stood astonished, leaning against the palm tree under which he had slept, and looking seawards in the broadening light.

Less than a quarter of a mile away a flat reef jutted out into the sea, and hanging upon the reef and doubled over it like a half-filled sack thrown across a wall lay the wreck of the *Sappho* gleaming white in the dawn. She lay high and dry, her funnel and masts gone, her back broken and a black chasm showing amid-ships. But it was the *Sappho*, a bit of yesterday, a thing of human meaning.

Gretton ran. He forgot his stiffness and his hunger as he cut through the scrub and along the sands.

"Somebody may be alive there! Somebody may be alive!"

His heart beat like a bell. Even the tallow-grease face of Brough the "trimmer" would be more humanly welcome than any angel face looking down out of heaven, but as he ran the hope drizzled out of Gretton's eyes. The *Sappho* stood out in all her battered nakedness. The sea had capsized her, played with her awhile, and

then thrown her broken but deck uppermost upon the reef. She hung there smashed, ridiculous, dead. No live thing could have survived in that squash of timber and steel.

But there might be other things left in the *Sappho* — clothing, food. The savage man elbowed the civilized man aside and made a rush for the wreck. Gretton picked his way along the reef, the vitals of the *Sappho* visible to his eyes, the sections of a model cut in half. He saw cabin doors, strips of deck, machinery, dark crevices, twisted plates, a sort of pigeon-hole effect. The reef was littered with wreckage. He saw a body wedged in a crevice, glanced at it, recognized Jennings, the engineer, and went on with a sense of chilliness at the pit of his stomach.

An axe lay in a pool of water. It came to Gretton's hand as a rude tool leaps to the hand of a primitive man. He climbed in and up through the V-shaped chasm in the *Sappho's* hulk, and there were things here that made him set his teeth, glimpses of the live men who had been trapped, suffocated, crushed. The soul in him cried out "Thank God she was drowned!"

But he was alive and he was hungry. He scrambled and burrowed into the wreck, to be astonished by the tricks the storm had played. He found the little saloon almost intact, save for the smashed fittings and an ooze of sand and water everywhere. He had remembered seeing a door marked "Stores," and he found it, down below, not five yards from the place where the yacht had broken in half. The door was jammed. He attacked it with his axe.

Gretton broke in, and through a porthole saw the yellow sun hanging over the sea. This store-room made him gloat, even though it resembled a grocery shop into which some giant had scooped a hand. Tins everywhere, tinned fruits, fish, meat and vegetables, bottles broken and unbroken, bags, sacks, cases, canisters. And all these tins and cases were intact! The wild man in him yelped exultantly.

Gretton operated with the axe, and squatting on a sack of wet flour, ate corn-beef from the jagged and rudely opened tin. Two blows from the hammer end of the axe knocked in the top of a canister of biscuits. He was in the act of leaning over to help himself when he heard the voice:

"Who's there?"

Gretton stiffened, doubting his own ears.

"Hallo! Who's there?"

The voice was real enough, a woman's voice, flat and metallic, and disastrously familiar. Gretton stood up, the tin of corned beef in one hand, a biscuit in the other. There had been a momentary flicker of joy in his eyes at the sound of a human voice, but it was replaced by an expression of ironical and amazed disgust.

"Helen Glaber!"

Then others might be alive! There was compensation in the thought, but when he heard her climbing through the wreckage he felt shot through by a thrill of anger. This woman of all women! This piece of sun-baked brick and leather!

He turned out of the storeroom and, walking along the alleyway, saw her face rising above the edge of the broken deck. He stood still, the creature of nameless repulsions, instincts.

"It's you, Gretton."

He nodded and bit off a piece of biscuit. She was lifting herself up by a twisted stanchion, dressed in nothing but a petticoat and a torn white blouse. Her short, sandy hair hung about her neck, and her blue eyes were fierce with hunger. She looked at his tin of meat and his biscuit.

"Thanks, I'll have some of that."

She had taken the tin out of his hand even before he had realized her hunger, and he stared and said nothing, though the savage in him had uttered a whimper of resentment. She leant against the plaiting, eating the meat and using her fingers. Gretton's face had grown watchful, almost sinister.

"Have you seen any of the others?"

It cost him an effort to speak to her.

She went on eating.

"Hanson is lying dead on the sand over there. After all, it was his fault."

Something generous glowed in Gretton. It was like her — to condemn the dead.

"What do you mean — his fault?"

"He upset Captain Dick's judgment by quizzing him. We ought to have been under full steam and head on. Where did you find those biscuits? Get me one."

The silent part of him was in instant rebellion, and aloud he said: "You'll find them in the storeroom, down there."

She gave him a look that he had so often seen her give Mildred Arkell, a sort of crushing stare, but Gretton turned his back on her, and scrambled to the sunlight on the reef. He wanted to be alone, he, a lone animal who had been ready to howl for a human mate!

"Great Saints!" he found himself thinking, "I believe if she were dropped down a volcano she'd be blown up again the same bit of heartless, hell-cat brass!"

She was just the same. That was the amazing and ominous fact. Her hard "I lead the field" egotism had always astonished him, until he had learnt to hate her for it when he had seen her cruelty to Mildred Arkell. She did things well. She was a fine horsewoman and a crack shot, a woman whose complacency it seemed impossible to hurt. If she corrected you, which she often did, you would generally find that she was right. As Enderby had put it, "If you hit her on the head with a hammer, the thing would bounce off her and leave no mark."

But the irony of this coincidence, that he should be marooned on this derelict island with this very woman as his mate! Even in those first few moments he had felt himself up against her immense and unchastened egotism. But to live with it? In five minutes she would be running the island — and him.

He heard her voice crying from the wreck:

"Bob Gretton, I want some of these stores carried ashore."

She flashed into his vision, munching a biscuit, her white teeth gleaming in her fierce brown face.

Her eyes looked angry. There are eyes that are always like that.

"I'll tell you the first thing you have got to do. Get a spar up — and a flag. I'll show you the place."

And then something very strange happened suddenly to this civilized man. He seemed to go back ten thousand years. All the smooth and conventional compromises fell from him. He became man, the dominant male.

Climbing back into the wreck with a swift and swinging aggressiveness, he swarmed up to the broken deck where the woman stood watching him, the woman who had not changed. Now Gret-

ton was a big man, with a big face and a big jaw; he had a leonine largeness of head and eyes. And he looked wild, wilder than he knew, with his unshaven chin, his torn clothes and his bare chest showing hair.

He said nothing, but began to haul in the slack of a length of rope that dangled over the crust-edge of the upper deck. Then he went into the storeroom and carried out a case of biscuits. Roping it, he lowered it, and with a swing of the arms and body swung it through the gap in the yacht's side and on to the reef.

"Wait a bit. I'll tell you——"

He turned on her with a ferocity that was like the stroke of a lion's paw.

"Shut up. I don't want any talking. Get down there."

She flashed one of her brilliant and mechanical smiles at him.

"That's quite a good gaff!"

Next moment he had taken her by the shoulders, and pushed her over the edge of the broken deck, holding her by one arm till she had got a grip of something and seeing her descend like a clawing and astonished cat. He followed her. They finished up among the *Sappho's* bilge-plates, looking at each other across the bent propeller shaft.

"What's the joke?"

She was a little out of breath, hugely angry, and inclined to think him mad.

"Come on."

He reached over and caught her by the hair.

"Come on. This is my show."

For an instant her eyes flared; they were the eyes of a devil. And then she came climbing over the propeller shaft with that antarctic smile on her face.

"Oh, I see the joke all right!"

She thought him mad. The catastrophe had knocked his reason edgeways, but he stood six feet one and had the chest of a gladiator!

Gretton led her to the reef, holding her by the hair.

"See that clump of palms?"

He pointed and she nodded, her thin mouth furious.

"Unlash that case, and shoulder it over to the palm grove. Then come back for something else. That's your job. See?"

He let her go, and she looked at him as though she had a knife hidden behind her back, and was wondering where to strike him. Then she unknotted the rope, got the case on her right shoulder, and started off.

Gretton watched her. His nostrils were quivering, and he was breathing hard. For a moment his old, tame, civilized self tried to obtrude itself, but was kicked back into its kennel. He was looking at the female figure in front of him. She was not female; he felt that as he looked at her. Her torn blouse showed two humpy shoulder-blades with a deep hollow between them, and in the hollow swam a big brown mole. He looked at the two bare legs below the short petticoat. They were irritating legs, rather like badly shaped stockings stuffed with bran, complacent, sleek, sexless. Her feet were too long. There was a flatness about her whole figure, a flatness that displeased him. He turned back to the wreck.

"She thinks me mad!"

He stood and laughed, opening his shoulders and throwing back his head.

"She can go on thinking it—till I have taught her her lesson."

And then he thought of Mildred Arkell and dead Hanson, and his laughter died away.

"What irony! Hell, but I wonder how long this has got to last?"

He set to work on the wreck, collecting all the undamaged stores from the storeroom and slinging them over the side. The *Sappho's* water-tanks had caved in, but he found a small tank in the steward's pantry that still held water, enough to last for a couple of days. He drank from an aluminum tumbler that he had found, and remembered Helen Glaber.

"I wonder if she'll come back?"

He walked to the end of the broken deck, and found her waiting down below. She was polite, venomously formal.

"What next, Mr. Gretton?"

His distaste for her increased, but he felt himself responsible.

"I have found some water. Come up and drink."

She obeyed him, but he let her use an enamelled mug. The aluminum tumbler was his. He saw that she hated him, and knew that her acquiescence humoured his supposed insanity.

"All those stores must be carried across."

She smiled.

"Don't you think, Mr. Gretton——?"

"I am thinking," he said roughly, and she turned about, but he called her back.

"You will have a meal ready at noon. Here's what you want. A tin opener, knives and forks, four plates. I'll pass them down to you."

She went like a lamb, but he suspected the wolf in the lambskin, and all through the morning between his pitching of ropes, spars, tools, and sail-cloth on to the reef, he kept an eye on her activities. She was as strong as most men, and she stuck to her work, going sullenly to and fro between the wreck and the palm grove, but Gretton had no pity.

"If Mildred were alive," he thought, "and you were in my place, you would be making her toil like a galley-slave."

When noon came, he walked across to the palm grove and found that she had everything ready, three boxes to serve as seats and a table, plates and knives and forks laid out, biscuits piled neatly, a tin of tongue and a tin of peaches open. He sat down and waited. She carved the tongue, helped herself, and was about to push it across to him when she found him looking hard at her.

She understood his look quite well. There was a moment's hesitation, then she passed the plate to him. He nodded, and pointed to his mug.

"Water."

He had filled a metal jug with water and brought it across. She got up and poured water into his tumbler. The man-emperor was served.

They worked together all the afternoon, carrying up stores and gear, and Gretton spent two hours putting up a couple of canvas shelters under the palms. The sun blazed, but they carried on. About five o'clock they knocked off for tea, a tea that consisted of water, biscuits and jam. The man-emperor did not unbend; the silence between them was so stiff with mutual antipathy that it showed no signs of becoming ridiculous.

"Mr. Gretton, I want to go to the wreck."

He was sitting with his back against a tree, examining a box of sodden cigars, and wondering how long they would take to dry

in the sun.

"All right."

"Clothes, you know." She flashed a smile at him. "Dick had a petrol-lighter. I must find it, or matches."

He nodded.

"There's Hanson, lying on the sands."

"I haven't forgotten him," he said curtly. "You'll bring back some matches and dry them. You can have an hour."

She looked at him queerly and went her way, and Gretton spent the time rigging up a spar and a flag in a conspicuous position on the beach. He ment to bury Hanson and the engineer at sundown, and he was suddenly confronted with the thought that Mildred Arkell's body might be washed ashore. He straightened himself and looked at the sea. "Keep her," he said aloud, "it is better so;" and turning, found Helen Glaber behind him.

Her eyes said: "Yes, you are mad. Mad people talk to themselves."

But there was more in her eyes than that. She had a sly, smooth look, like a cat that has stolen something and feels sleek with successful cleverness. Gretton noticed the change in her. This reversion to a more primitive attitude of the sexes seemed to have quickened his instincts, and made him as observant of detail as a savage. He felt things; he felt the change in the woman and in her mood towards him. "She has found something. She thinks she has got behind my back!" What was that something? He decided that it was a weapon.

Gretton dissembled.

"Any matches?"

She showed him a little canvas bag full of soaked matches.

"Good. I suppose they will dry."

They walked back to the palm grove, Gretton keeping slightly behind her and observing her with vague eyes. If she had found a weapon she had hidden it on her person or near the camp.

"Did you find your clothes?"

"No; but some of Mildred's."

This angered him most strangely, and he said no more.

When they reached the camp he took the matches from her and pretended to amuse himself in opening the boxes and laying the

sticks to dry on the top of a biscuit box. Helen Glaber had rescued some blankets from the yacht. She had carried them up in a tangled rope, and was bending over them and spreading them on the ground. Gretton was behind her, right hand poised and holding a match. As she bent down he saw something swing under her petticoat and bulge it out ever so slightly, and Gretton smiled.

He got up, yawned, stretched himself, edging near to her with casual indirectness as though vaguely interested in the blankets. She had disentangled them, meaning to spread them on the bushes. She glanced round. Gretton was close to her.

And suddenly he made a leap and caught her wrists. They stood close, looking into each other's eyes. The woman was afraid.

"Put your hands up, over your head! Keep them there."

She obeyed him, furious yet cowed. He knelt down, groped for a moment, gave a fierce twitch of the arm and stood up holding a revolver that she had slung from her waist with a piece of tape.

"I thought so."

He examined it and saw that it was loaded.

"You thought that you might like to use it?"

She said nothing. Her impression of his madness began to fade away. Her angry eyes masked a sudden respect for him.

"Any more of these toys?"

She shook her head.

"Thank you. But no more tricks. You understand."

He towered over her, and for the moment he thought that she was going to try the feminine trick of tears. She blinked, looked up at him with a sort of absurd bewilderment and then nodded her head. The man in him felt that he had her beaten.

Gretton walked down to the sea, and tossed the revolver well out into the water. Then he strolled along to the *Sappho* and searched every available nook and corner for any more toys of the same order. Hanson had owned a couple of sporting rifles, and Gretton found them in a case under Hanson's bunk. He carried them away with him, and buried them in the sand close to the graves he dug for Hanson and the engineer. He marked the two graves with the blade of the broken oar, and stood awhile in solemn silence before returning to the palms.

Here a new spirit surprised him. The woman had supper ready,

and on the box that was to serve as a table he saw his own whisky-flask, a petrol-lighter, a pipe and a tin of tobacco. He glanced at them and said nothing. Helen Glaber was busy in one of the canvas shelters; she had collected dry grass and was making a bed.

His bed! He guessed that at once, and yet the man in him was not touched. She had reverted suddenly to the primæval, feminine methods. The beast was to be managed, if he could not be ruled.

"Is that my bed?"

"Yes."

He accepted her labours and her ingenuities with casual matter-of-factness. They supped; they sat awhile in silence, and then crawled each into their respective shelters. Gretton smoked for an hour, but he did not lie down until he knew by the sound of her breathing that the woman was asleep.

Gretton was up early, while Helen Glaber was still asleep.

With a big can slung over his shoulders he started westwards along the beach, intending to find the place where the island's minute stream of fresh water made its way into the sea. Passing the wreck of the *Sappho,* and the two graves, he paused to light his pipe. His mood was one of grimness and depression, a mood of reaction after the strenuous happenings of the first day upon the island. Man is in the main a less persistent creature than woman, and Gretton was savagely bored by the prospects of a daily battle of wills between himself and Helen Glaber. He glimpsed the only possible law upon the island, an autocracy of one, the law of the male fist.

And then fate blew his pessimism into the limbo of forgotten ills. He had walked another half mile along the beach, and had stopped to relight his pipe, when the island behaved like Prospero's island in *The Tempest.* Gretton stood absolutely still, the match burning between finger and thumb. He felt his heart beating fast and hard, for he had heard a voice, or rather the ghost of a voice, that cried out feebly, "Water, water!"

Gretton could see nothing but the broad stretch of sand between the scrub and the sea. This "Ariel" voice seemed to have come from nowhere, and then he heard it again, a little moaning cry, and the words:

"Water, water!"

He was trembling like a dog; and the next moment he was running along the sands, shouting as he ran:

"Where are you? Where are you?"

He came quite suddenly upon her, lying in a sandy hollow, and for a moment he stood on the low ridge above her resting-place, hardly able to believe that she was real. The coincidence seemed too impossible. Both women alive, and all the men, save himself, dead.

Almost instantly he was down on the sands beside her, bending over her with immense tenderness. The miracle had changed him and the whole island. She was looking at him vaguely, and then, stretching out an unsteady hand, touched his face as though she doubted its solidity. He saw that her right leg was broken, for it lay all twisted. She had crawled a little way up the beach and lain there for thirty-six hours, with nothing to drink all through the blaze of a southern day.

"Thank God I found you," he said.

Her lips and mouth were so dry that she could hardly speak.

"Bob, is it you, really?"

"Thank God!" he said again; "thank God I came this way."

She was so feeble and so spent that he began to be in terror for her life, and his heart beat to action. He bent over her, whispering like a mother to a child.

"Don't be frightened any more, I am going to fetch you water. I have a camp over there, and a tent and food. I'll be back in twenty minutes."

She touched his face again with her fingers and smiled very faintly.

"Dear Bob!"

He kissed her forehead and ran back to the palm grove. Helen Glaber was just emerging from her shelter; she flashed him a lime-light smile, but he had no words for Helen Glaber. He was a whirlwind, and she sat on her heels and watched him with suspicious eyes. His actions revived her opinion of his madness. He half filled the water can, stuffed the whisky flask and the tumbler into the pockets of his drill jacket, and added some biscuits and a jack-knife. Two pieces of wood from the lid of a box, a length

of frayed rope, and a blanket completed his equipment. He started off again at full speed, and without a word to the woman.

"The man's off his head," she said to herself; "a nice life this, with a mad dog on an island!"

She picked up the lid of a biscuit tin and looked at the reflection of her own face. It seemed to please her. She sat and smiled.

After a morning dip, and an alfresco toilet made while the madman was playing Crusoe somewhere on the beach, she set herself to prepare breakfast, and even rose to the refinement of lighting a fire and boiling a kettle. She was opening a tin of tongue and making rather a mess of it when she heard Gretton pushing through the scrub. She had decided to try a coy and persuasive attitude, and she did not look round at him.

"Those blankets on the bushes. Get them."

She glanced up, and her face seemed to lengthen till it was as long as the face of a Roman-nosed horse. She blinked, screwed up her hard mouth, and was on her feet instantly.

"What? Mildred!"

Gretton carried the girl past her.

"Wait. Is her leg broken? If so — you ought not ——"

Gretton swung a look at her over his shoulder.

"Did you hear me? Get — those — blankets."

For at the sight of the girl whom she had bullied for two years Helen Glaber's matchless egotism had reasserted itself. The whole situation had changed. The man-thing was in the minority. Moreover, she had once more revised her opinion of his madness.

But Gretton's words were like a blow in her face, a male fist that threatened. She hesitated, and then went for the blankets.

Gretton had carried Mildred Arkell into his canvas shelter and, kneeling, laid her very gently on the ground. He had splinted the broken leg and lashed her feet together so as to steady the broken limb while he carried her to the palm grove.

"How's that? Have I hurt you?"

She smiled at him.

"No."

He turned to find Helen Glaber pushing into the shelter with the blankets in her arms; but Gretton took the blankets from her and extruded her with a broad and uncompromising back.

"Go and pull some more grass for a pillow."

It was then that Helen Glaber showed fight. Mildred Arkell belonged to her. Had she not taken the girl out of a country parsonage, paid her thirty pounds a year, and used her as a scapegoat for all her moods and tempers? Gretton had lost the supreme advantage that solitude had given him. Three constitutes a crowd, a society. Helen Glaber believed that she could dominate Mildred, and so control this desert island.

"Will you get out of my way, please. This is my affair. Mildred belongs to me."

Gretton was spreading the blankets on the dry grass that had formed his bed.

"I think not," he said quietly.

She tried to push past him.

"Mildred, dear, I must set that leg of yours — properly ——"

It was her bid for power in that little world of three, but she was to be met and defeated by a force that she had always ignored, the thing that we call "love," the power that is behind all the strivings and the sufferings of a civilization that began in a jungle life thousands of centuries ago. The girl on the ground cried out with sudden and passionate vehemence:

"I won't be touched by her! I couldn't bear to be touched by her. Bob, send her away."

Gretton rose from his knees and turned on Helen Glaber.

Their eyes met.

"You are not wanted in here. I think that's obvious."

With a firm hand on her shoulder he pushed her out of Mildred Arkell's sail-cloth tent and pointed to the other shelter.

"That's yours. It's a bit too near to our half of the camp. I'll shift it for you presently."

Her eyes flared with sudden hatred.

"I can do that for myself," she said.

So love outvoted hate; and when, some six weeks later, the tramp steamship *Alabama* put in to water at the island where the *Sappho's* wreck and the flag flying on the beach spoke of a tragedy, the captain's glass discovered people who lived. A boat had put off from the *Alabama,* and a man and a girl were standing on the

edge of the palm grove, watching the boat's crew pulling towards the island. A hundred yards away a third figure, the figure of a woman, showed against the dark trunks of the palms. There appeared to be two separate camps on the island, one with two shelters placed side by side, the other with a solitary tent standing alone.

"Gee, that's queer!" said the man with the telescope; "seems as though one of them has seceded! Two republics on one derelict island!"

The three figures moved down to the beach, but the man and the girl held aloof from the woman.

"This beats the band!" said the *Alabama's* captain; "they don't even recognize each other! It's a clean cut! Not on speaking terms! Wa'l, I always did say that to find out what the inside of life was like you'd got to be wrecked on a desert island with two women and no dog!"

But in the course of a few days he had learnt to appreciate the human irony of the affair, and had taken off his shoes in the "Court of the Lovers."

"I guess that hell-cat has had her tail twisted!"

And when the girl and the man were married, he put on white cotton gloves and went ashore to help in the blessing.

Caliban

I WAS TURNING AWAY FROM THE BOOKSTALL AT WATERLOO WHEN I met Netta Rainsford.

"The ubiquitous Josiah!" she said, smiling in my face; "I thought you were in Egypt."

It had seemed to me Netta's destiny to provoke the archaic, romantic and obvious man in me, and if I had been disastrously in love with her, I had found my love a disaster. A month ago we had quarrelled.

She provoked me now, this slim, audacious thing, so defiant, so fragile, so elusive. Her hair was the colour of honey, her red mouth the most tantalizing mouth I had ever seen. Her grey eyes with their long dark lashes always made one think of a sword half hidden under a cloak of black velvet.

"I suppose you are going to Merlin Court?" she added.

"I am."

"And so am I."

I saw her eyes defy me. It was Netta's recklessness, her passion for discovering anything bizarre and unusual that had made me afraid for her.

"It's impossible," I said angrily; "you can't go there."

"Thank you. If you can go — why not I?"

"It's different. I have a reason for going, and I happen to be a man."

She looked at me and laughed.

"We can't stand here quarrelling. You should not allow yourself to quarrel with a mere woman. A great big man who has hunted lions, and who was solemnly christened Josiah Orchardson."

I know she thought me a fool, an old-fashioned, muscular, sentimental fool with all the passions and prejudices of an Elizabethan. She thought my name foolish. She was as quick as light, and I a great blundering bumble-bee, yet there were ugly shadows in life

that this audacious and wilful child had not discovered, and we had quarrelled because I had tried to put myself between her and these shadows.

"You won't go," I said with sudden gentleness. "You may laugh at me and at my name, but you won't go to Merlin Court."

"I have my ticket and my luggage is labelled. Besides — it will be so amusing down there."

"Amusing! I think I shall thrash that man Jerram for having the impertinence to ask you. What a set!"

She flushed up, and then grew very pale.

"Mr. Jerram is a genius. He interests me. I shall meet clever people there. I think it is Mr. Josiah Orchardson who shall stay behind."

"He will be the fool — or Caliban. I am expected to take part in some futurist fooling or other: *The Tempest — as it Really Happened,* I think Musgrave called it."

She turned and walked slowly towards the platform. People had begun to stare.

"How did you get your invitation?" she asked.

"Through Musgrave."

"And why?"

"Because I thought you might be there."

She was angry, and yet I had a feeling that there was something behind her anger. If that little red mouth of hers was tempted to exclaim, "Who will rid men of this turbulent fool?" her heart had a certain liking for the fool. I loved her. She might be a brilliant, elusive, mischievous Greek child of the Sun, but some day she might need the strong brown arms of a mortal man to seize the reins of her falling chariot.

I followed her through the gates. Her porter had secured her a corner seat in a first-class carriage in the centre of the train. She stepped in, sat down and opened a magazine.

"Please go away and smoke," she said; "I might find it rather trying being caged up with a lion."

I closed the door.

"Some day ——" I began.

But she put up the magazine and pretended to hide a yawn.

I got into a "smoker" a few carriages away from her, but there

was not much comfort in my pipe. So we had quarrelled again, and it appeared that we should go on quarrelling, my male creed clashing with her too restive feminine independence. I knew that she was far cleverer than I was, and yet her cleverness seemed no shield against the evil genius of Ambrose Jerram.

Perhaps it was the sinister and strange genius of the man that attracted her. If I thought of Netta as a white nymph of the woods, I could picture Jerram as a faun. He was extraordinarily ugly, monstrously yet magnificently ugly, a great swarthy creature with the head of a Pan and eyes of fire. The Jerrams had all been wild men, from the first Jerram in history who had blown up his own ship and two Spaniards who lay beside him, rather than surrender. If genius spells madness, then this last of the Jerrams was mad, and with a malicious, brilliant and extravagant madness that seemed inspired by the Spirit of Evil. Clever people had read his poems, and some of them had burnt the book — and gone out into a place where flowers grew. With all that coarse Pan's face of his he had touches of the divine fire. No narcotized, anæmic decadent — this. At Oxford he had been feared for his wild, mad animal strength. He was a musician, a rhapsodist, a fine horseman, a powerful swimmer. He had wit, a sort of devilish, playful eloquence that made the average man sit and stare like a yokel in a thunderstorm.

His house-parties were famous. He always had some mad burlesque to amuse people, and worldlings who were exquisitely bored with life gathered at Merlin Court. It was Musgrave who had obtained me the invitation by boasting that I could bray like an ass. "We are going to revise Shakespeare" was all he had said to me; "bring a Monsieur Beaucaire suit and a white wig."

A big, black limousine was waiting for us at Frencham station, and whirled us towards the sunset and Merlin Court. We went down into a deep green valley that was all dusky with the shadows of huge beech-trees. Netta sat with her hands in her lap, her dark eyes looking towards the sunset, her hair ashine with it, and I thought that I had never seen any creature look more ethereal and enchanting.

I had apologized for being in the car, and she had made my sarcasm sound foolish.

"Why did they christen you Josiah?" she had asked.

We drove through Jerram's woods in silence.

I felt strangely sensitive that summer evening, sensitive to Netta's beauty, to the sun-splashed splendour of the woods and their strange, mysterious shadows. This valley seemed enchanted. It was part of a goblin world, and yet the very beauty of it was evil. I am not a "psychic," but this landscape breathed whisperings of tragedy. When the car climbed out of the gloom of the park into a gorgeous wilderness of rhododendrons and azaleas, the world seemed on fire, aflame to the very foot of the old red Jacobean house. The cedars on the lawn were black against the sunset, and from under one of them came Ambrose Jerram with his tawny eyes and all his magnificent ugliness. It struck me suddenly that he should have been naked, a figure of barbaric bronze, horned and hoofed like a satyr.

I noticed a group of people under the nearest cedar, all dressed in the costume of the Georges. Jerram himself wore a suit of black satin. He stood bowing to Netta — and when I saw him look at her I knew that I hated Jerram with all my body and soul.

"I hope you will excuse the incongruity of the car. You see — we have all gone back a hundred and fifty years."

He kissed her hand, and his big red mouth seemed to cover the whole of it.

Netta smiled at him.

"If you had sent a coach we should have missed our dinner, and Mr. Orchardson cannot bear to be unpunctual."

Jerram looked at me and held out a hand. It was a big hand, shaded with black hair.

"Glad to see you; I hope you have come dressed for the part."

I took his hand. His tawny eyes looked into mine. They were like the eyes of some great cat — menacing, yet ironical.

Musgrave came up to my room and helped me to change. He was in white and silver, colours that suited his florid and handsome face. I liked Musgrave. His world was the world of the man about town, but there was no harm in him. He helped me into my green satin coat and tied my lace cravat for me, and from him I learnt the names of Jerram's other guests. The group under the cedar had included Bertrand Blare, poet and decadent; Agatha Western, secretary of the Pomegranate Club; Haines of the Foreign

Office, a "highbrow"; Millie Cumberbatch, who looked like a Watteau shepherdess; and Backhouse of the "Guards," one of the finest polo players in the world. There were others; but they were mere supernumeraries, figures in Ambrose Jerram's landscape.

Musgrave had two letters to write, and I went out to explore. My bedroom door opened on a great gallery that ran from east to west. It was hung with pictures and armour and lined with old furniture, and its black and polished floor caught the last sunlight that poured in through the western window, making me think of the still black waters of some Flemish canal mirroring the old houses on either side of it. The surface gave one a strange sense of depth and of mystery. I saw the silver of the armour reflected in it, the red and blue and gold of the lacquer cabinets, even the colours of the pictures. I was standing there obsessed by its almost sinister beauty when I saw Netta Rainsford come out of her room, and pause to look at some portrait that hung opposite her door. She was dressed in white, and the great western window gave her figure an aura of yellow light.

I walked slowly up the gallery and stood by her side. She was looking at the portrait of one of the Jerrams, a man in black satin and wearing a heavy black periwig. The portrait was two hundred years old, but the face was the face of Ambrose Jerram.

"Heredity," I said.

She gave me a slightly impatient look.

"And minute, my dear Josh?"

"The obvious thing may be very remarkable. I wonder which Jerram this was?"

She continued to gaze at the portrait.

"Lucifer Jerram. He was supposed to be mad. Some Italian killed him at Naples."

"My sympathies are with the Italian," I said.

I heard a door open, and turning my head saw Jerram looking at us. It was as though the man had stepped down from the picture, and the likeness troubled me.

So did Jerram's smile. It was so ugly, so full of some unfathomable madness. His eyes looked like two points of fire.

"You know my ancestor, Miss Rainsford?"

She laughed.

"I was trying to explain him to Mr. Orchardson."

"There are some things that it would be difficult to explain to Mr. Orchardson——"

His smiling eyes were on me, and I knew that we hated each other.

"Sometimes the unexplainable things are obvious," I said.

Dinner was an exotic affair, and the long "cavalier table" so piled with flowers and fruit that it made me think of some Bacchic feast. Jerram had Netta on his right, and I sat next to her with Agatha Western as my partner. Jerram was brilliant. I think he had acknowledged me as his rival, and that his placing me next to Netta was a challenge. He meant to outtalk me, eclipse me, make me seem a heavy, sententious fool, and he succeeded.

I could make nothing of Agatha Western; she was too modern and too cynical, and I think she enjoyed seeing me blundering in the mazes of Jerram's wit. He was mad, divinely mad, and even his gigantic ugliness came to have devilish fascination. He seemed to mesmerise Netta, and I saw little more than the curves of her profile and of her shoulder; and once, when Jerram stung me with some stab of wit, she laughed like a Bacchic girl.

I was angry, and my anger made me more clumsy.

"I am afraid I am not much good at blowing froth," I said.

Someone laughed.

"Define froth," drawled Blare from the other side of the table.

Jerram took up the challenge.

"Froth is the foam that genius blows from the muddy ale of mediocrity. Mr. Orchardson prefers the ale."

"It is honest stuff," I said.

The whole party mocked me.

"Say, rather — respectable."

"Perhaps Mr. Orchardson will lecture us on his duty towards his neighbour?"

I looked at Netta.

"That might be too personal."

She gave a defiant lift of the head.

"Mr. Orchardson is too — sane," said Jerram; "sanity is the great illusion. We are mad, hopelessly mad. Of course, Mr. Orchardson would argue——"

"I won't argue the extent of your madness."

His eyes gave me a flash of mockery. He picked up a pomegranate from a silver dish and put it on Netta's plate.

"Madness is the seed of life. It was Eve who coveted the first pomegranate."

From that moment I felt that I was contending with him for Netta's soul, that the Spirit of Evil in him coveted her, and that the strife between us was as old as Time.

I laughed, and in laughing saved my dignity and recovered my poise. A sportsman learns to keep his temper, and I kept it the whole evening in spite of some rather vicious teasing. I watched Netta and was puzzled, for I had not realized then that a woman can be clever and audacious and yet remain most amazingly ingenuous. To Netta all this fooling was mere preposterous and amusing mischief. She was still an incorrigible child, chasing butterflies, suspecting no guile.

Jerram played the violin, and he played like a divine madman. Backhouse and Millie Cumberbatch began to waltz on the terrace. Soon they were all dancing in the moonlight to the sound of Jerram's violin. I was sitting on the balustrade talking to a pleasant little widow who seemed lost in such company; Netta was dancing with Musgrave. Suddenly I saw Jerram start up and begin to dance to his own music. A sudden childish madness seized everybody. Agatha Western had run in through one of the French windows, seated herself at the piano, and caught up the waltz that Jerram was playing.

I saw Jerram toss his violin through the window, sweep across the terrace with arms spread, and take Musgrave by the neck.

"Mine, sir, mine."

He took Netta from Musgrave, and next moment he had her in his arms, and they were moving together in the moonlight, the white figure and the black. There was an abandonment in Jerram's dancing that made me savage. He swept Netta close to me, looking me in the face with a smile of triumph.

"Hallo, Mr. Dull Ale."

I gripped the stone coping of the balustrade, and made myself go on talking to little Mrs. Erskine whose eyes made me think of the shocked eyes of a child.

When this mad mood had passed I walked across the terrace to Netta who was standing by one of the open windows. Jerram had disappeared and I heard him talking to Agatha Western.

"Play the Hungarian Rhapsody," I heard him say to her.

I took Netta's arm. She was still a little breathless and excited.

"You are not going to dance again," I said very quietly.

She looked at me over her shoulder.

"Why not?"

"That man is mad."

"Oh, don't be so foolish."

I kept my hand on her arm.

"You don't realize his madness," I said, "but I do. It is for you to choose. Either you go to bed — or ——"

Her eyes met mine.

"How impossible you are! You are hurting my arm."

"I'm sorry. Are you going to bed — or shall I have to pitch Jerram over that balustrade? He is my host — you know."

"Josh, you are a savage!"

I drew her away towards the end of the terrace.

"Netta, won't you believe that I care a little, that I am not a jealous fool? You ought not to be here; you are much too fine, and too clean. You can't marry that man. He would make your life a hell."

She was angry; I had hurt her pride.

"Thank you. Do you think that I am quite incapable of managing my own affairs? Don't be so absurd. I have no intention of marrying Ambrose Jerram, or any other man."

"But Jerram may not agree."

She turned quickly and faced me.

"What do you mean?"

"That man is dangerous; he is not sane."

"Mr. Orchardson — you ——"

She twisted herself free.

"You — you are quite impossible. You cannot even enjoy a little mad fooling. Good night."

She turned and walked into the house, putting everyone — even Jerram — aside with a merciless dignity.

"No; I am tired. Good night."

Jerram looked at me with his eyes of fire.

"You fool," they seemed to say.

They were still dancing when I went to bed, and I had turned out the light before I heard their laughter and a shutting of doors in the great gallery. The moon was full on my window. I had left the curtains undrawn and the blind up, for I felt that I should not go to sleep. I was too angry and too troubled, and too much in love with Netta Rainsford. Even my exasperation at being pushed by circumstances into this second quarrel was effaced by the impatience of my tenderness for her.

I could not sleep and, getting out of bed, I pushed an arm-chair to the window and sat there in the full light of the moon. It was an exquisite night, and so still that I could hear the water falling over the weir in the valley half a mile away. The great trees were masses of black silence, their trunks splashed with the moonlight. The park was a rolling sheet of silver stippled with patches of shadow. I could smell the strange, pungent scent of the azaleas in the beds below the terrace.

Suddenly I sat forward in my chair, listening. A sound had come to me out of the night, a sound that seemed to send a mysterious tremor through my body. There was laughter down there in the woods, mad and vibrant laughter that made me picture some wild man leaping and dancing under the trees. There was something so primitive about it, so faunlike that I could imagine myself back in the dim and pagan past, and waiting to see Pan push his grotesque head from behind some tree.

The laughter came nearer. I leant forward with my arms on the window sill, my skin all aprickle with a sense of cold. Then there was silence, quite a long silence. I had almost begun to doubt whether I had really heard that laughter when I caught a sound that made me lean forward out of the window. Something was running up one of the paths and with quick, padding footsteps, and a patter that only naked feet could make.

Something appeared in the moonlight, leaping up the white steps of the terrace, a half-naked figure in a coat of skins. Its right hand waved a branch that had been torn from a tree; its head seemed to rock between its great brown shoulders.

It was Jerram.

He came loping across the terrace and entered the house. Next moment I was across the room with my hand on the door-handle. I opened the door about an inch and stood listening, and presently I heard those naked feet on the stairs. They passed along the gallery to the east wing of the house. I heard a door open and close. Then there was silence.

"The man's mad," I said to myself.

I half dressed myself, and leaving my door ajar, sat in the chair for the rest of the night.

At breakfast I found myself alone with Musgrave, but I could not make up my mind to tell him what I had seen, and Jerram joined us before the end of the meal. There was something strange about the man. He sat and glared, and said nothing; but now and again a smile would break out on his face — the brutish smile of a Caliban.

I loitered about, waiting for Netta. She came down with Millie Cumberbatch, and she gave me no chance to speak with her alone. The whole house-party collected with desultory leisureliness in chairs on the terrace. We lounged and gossiped, and discussed Jerram's programme for the day, and the grotesque fooling that might be expected. He had disappeared, and was supposed to be writing letters.

Backhouse, Haines and two of the girls were talking of a mixed four at tennis, but they were still in their deck-chairs dallying with the idea, when Ambrose Jerram joined us. His ugly face looked sly, elvish and mischievous, but there was more than mischief in his tawny eyes. He had a number of slips of paper in his hand.

"May I explain the day to the inmates of the asylum?"

Blare glanced at him from his long cane-chair.

"You won't expect me to run about, Jerram? I detest running about."

Jarram handed him one of the slips of paper.

Blare looked at it.

"Gonzalo. That's a heavy, ponderous part!"

"You can lie under a tree and be prosy."

Jerram distributed the remaining slips of paper. Netta was to be Miranda; Musgrave, Prospero; Agatha Western, Ariel; Backhouse, Alanso; Haines, Antonio; and so on. I read Ferdinand on

my slip, and sat searching for Jerram's motive in linking me with Miranda.

"Yes, and who is Caliban? Who is to be Caliban?"

The whole group joined in the question.

Jerram looked.

"Being the ugliest of you all, I have reserved the part for myself."

From that moment I began to glimpse the sinister possibilities that were working in this madman's brain.

He stood in the midst of us.

"Neo-Shakespeareans — all — we are not so mad as Shakespeare. At four o'clock the bell will ring, and this landscape will become the island. Prospero's cell is the boathouse by the pool, but no one is under any obligation to follow Shakespeare. You can dress as you please, go where you please, play your parts as you please."

Blare sat up.

"That's an idea. We originate, eh?"

"Quite so. Mr. Orchardson will make what he pleases of Ferdinand. I shall make what I please of Caliban. Musgrave will modernize Prospero."

"Do we go out in a procession, or each as the whim jumps?"

"Each one goes out alone."

"What a game of hide and seek! But supposing that we never find each other?"

"That should add to the originality of it," said Jerram; "even Ariel may not be able to persecute Caliban."

He bowed to us all with flamboyant archness.

"Miranda, Ceres, Juno and the nymphs will be preoccupied with the question of clothes. After lunch we will all of us remain invisible——"

"But what about the tempest?" drawled Blare; "can't you raise some thunder."

"Take an umbrella with you, my dear man, and use your imagination."

None of us saw Jerram again. He walked down the steps into the garden and disappeared. I loitered near Netta, and just before the luncheon bell rang Millie Cumberbatch gave me my opportunity.

"Where are we to meet," I asked her.

"Do we meet?"

"If you are Miranda and I am Ferdinand——"

"Oh, it is all altered; we follow our own inclinations. Miranda may improve upon the play."

There was no machinery in Netta's eyes this morning, though she was ready to tantalize me with her playfulness. Something had happened to her. She was serious below the surface, a little distraught, a little less sure of herself and her surroundings. I thought that I saw a glimmer of friendliness in her eyes.

"Then you will not quarrel with me," I asked her, "if I follow my inclination?"

"May I ask what it will be?"

"That silly old sentiment we call chivalry."

Her long black lashes hid her eyes. The bell rang, and she rose.

"I shall run away," she said, "and play hide and seek."

She looked quickly at the others, and then added in an undertone:

"But keep near me; I would like to have you near me."

I think she had begun to be a little afraid of Jerram.

At four o'clock I was sitting on the terrace steps, dressed in my green satin court suit, and wondering what was going to happen. I was in a supercilious mood, and quite convinced that there were the makings of a tragedy in the deeps of those great woods. I had seen Jerram as Caliban, and I could not forget his laughter. I did not mean to let Netta out of my sight, and there was a devout rage at the back of my thoughts.

I did not see any of the others, save Blare and Mrs. Erskine who passed me on the steps, Mrs. Erskine dressed as a Watteau shepherdess, Blare looking like a sort of bored Svengali in a black velvet coat. Agatha Western, Haines, Backhouse and the rest had caught the spirit of the adventure and had gone off different ways. I waited there for Netta.

She came out to me in a loose robe of deep, rose-coloured silk. Her honey-coloured hair hung in a tawny mass. She wore sandals on her little white feet.

"Are you ready?"

I stood up and bowed to her, and she must have seen all that was in my eyes.

"Do you think that Miranda was like this, Josh?"

"No," I said; "I don't. What a loathsome name that is of mine."

She smiled, half shy, half mischievous.

"It is an honest name—I think I rather like it. But what would be the difference between me and Miranda?"

"It's so obvious. You would have made Miranda look an utter Victorian."

"Thank you, Josh," she said.

We went down together through the garden and into the park where the shadows of the trees were beginning to lie with long gentleness upon the grass. A path led down through the woods to the boat-house by the pool, and we found Musgrave and Mrs. Erskine there sitting in the punt and abusing the flies.

"You are a pretty Prospero," said Netta, "a magician worried by midges! Has anyone seen Caliban?"

Musgrave looked bored.

"I've seen nothing but Blare. He had forgotten his matches and wanted to borrow mine."

There was a canoe in the boat-house. I persuaded Netta into it, and we paddled about for half an hour among the waterlilies and the reeds. Then she protested that we were not helping the others to evolve a masterpiece and we landed in the beech wood on the other side of the pool.

We must have wandered about for an hour, and we saw no one, but all the time I had a most strange feeling that we were being watched. This beech wood stretched for a mile or more, a mile of shadows and of mystery, with its wayward paths in and out among the trunks of the great trees. The silence was extraordinary, yet once or twice I thought I heard a rustling of dead leaves.

"It is like the world before time was," she said.

And suddenly a spirit of mischief woke in her. She shook her hair at me in the deepening gloom of the woodland evening.

"We haven't escaped yet. I am still Netta Rainsford and you are Josiah Orchardson, two dull twentieth century people. Let's go back, back to the beginning of things."

"All right," I said, "what is it to be?"

"Hide and seek. I am a wild woman——"

She laughed and ran up the path.

"Give me three minutes, and then come and find me."

I watched her disappear into the shadows, and when she was lost in them a great uneasiness seized me. I could not explain it, but the feeling was so strong in me that before a minute had passed I was following her up the path.

"Netta," I shouted, "where are you?"

I stood still, listening. The foliage of the beeches was growing dusky in the twilight, and here and there a patch of deep blue sky showed between the branches. The place seemed a great smoldering mystery, a net, a maze in which we were entangled. I shouted again and had no answer.

I ran on, with a vision in my mind of Jerram as I had seen him the night before.

Suddenly I stood still. I heard a movement of the wood, a cry, and then laughter, laughter that made me bristle.

I could see nothing but the trees.

"Netta," I shouted.

Next moment I heard her cry to me for help.

"Josh — Josh — oh! be quick ——"

Something smothered her cry, but I was running like a madman in the direction from which it had come. The luck of the gods was with me.

A little glade opened in front of me, and half way down it I saw a brown-black figure of a man running with Netta in his arms. I saw her head hanging and her fair hair a trail, and the brawny breadth of the man's back.

The anger of the gods was in me. It was a love chase, and Jerram was hindered by having Netta in his arms. I saw her look back over his right shoulder, and I caught the mad flare of his eyes. I was closing in on him, and he knew that he could not escape.

I was within ten yards of Jerram when he flung Netta down and turned on me. He had flung her down brutally, and she did not move.

"Ho — lo — Caliban."

He roared and came at me like a wild beast, and the anger in me blessed God for his madness. I knew that he was stronger than I was, but then I knew things that Jerram did not know. My anger was a sword against the club of his brute madness.

He came in swinging his arms, and I let him come till he was almost clawing me, and then I struck and sent him down. He was up again, squealing with fury, but he was a child with his fists and his rushes were easily countered. I kept clear, using my feet, and working for the blow that should knock him out. He had the head of a negro, and I could have pummelled it all day. I was waiting for that blow on the throat, and when I gave it him, full on the larynx, he crumpled up and lay choking.

Netta was sitting up, dazed, her eyes big with fear. She stretched out her arms to me.

"Oh, Josh! take me away."

I picked her up in my arms, and with a look at Caliban, who was still sprawling and coughing on the ground, carried her through the beech wood towards the pool. Her right arm was round my neck, her head on my shoulder.

"I won't quarrel with you again, Josh," she said; "please let me walk now."

I set her on her feet, but she kept hold of my hand. It was growing very dark under the trees and she drew close to me. I put my arm round her.

"Josh," she said.

"My darling!"

"I thought I was so clever, so modern. You will take me back to town to-night?"

"Of course. I'm your ——"

She laid her fingers on my mouth.

"Dear, old-fashioned, romantic lover! Oh, stay like that, Josh. I know now what a woman asks for, to be able to trust to a man's strength and honour."

I kissed her fingers.

"Often — you will think me a fool, dear."

"Never," she said.

Noise

SEFTON HAD COME TO ROME.

He had come because he had been a sick man and was not allowed to winter in England, and because he was poor, and was engaged in writing a masterpiece.

He had taken Holford's advice. Holford was one of those healthy, full-noon, confident fellows who know nothing of sickness or the writing of novels, and who could live serenely in a room next to a French lady who kept a poodle, a highly scented laugh, and a selection of lovers.

Holford had said: "That's it: go to Rome. I know the very hotel for you. Room on the fourth floor — view of the Borghese. You'll write great stuff in Rome. They know me at the 'Paradiso.' Mention my name."

Holford appeared to have been everywhere. Had Sefton said that he was going to Timbuctoo, Holford would have advised him — "Timbuctoo, just the place. Put up at the 'Palm Tree.' Mention my name."

Sefton took Holford's advice and chose the "Paradiso." He was given his room on the fourth floor, a little pink tank with a high door and a high window, and a view that held him in exquisite, eager gazing. He thought: "How splendid. I shall be able to write here. Holford does know a thing or two."

He settled himself in. He arranged a little table near the window. He found that when he sat at the table he had only to raise his eyes, and the greenness of the Borghese was spread above the redness of the Aurelian wall. It was very beautiful, but it would not distract him. Trees understand thought.

This upper floor of the "Paradiso" seemed very quiet. He decided to begin work after tea, and he went down and had tea in the lounge, and then ascended to that upper chamber. He was full of contentment, and at peace with the world.

But Sefton had failed to notice a door half way down the corridor shutting off a portion of the fourth floor, and when he reclimbed the stairs that door was open and another world revealed itself, a world that had been deceitfully silent during the earlier part of the afternoon. Sefton received a shock. The voices of two strapping young Italian women reverberated in the corridor. A small boy was pushing a wooden horse up and down. Two small girls were in the midst of an argument over the possession of a brown bear. There were sudden screams. Somewhere an infant was hammering the top of a tin box. The two nurses adjourned for a moment to deal with the squabbling pair upon the floor, and then resumed their vigorous discussion.

Sefton hesitated. He was a rather shy person. Then he went into his room and closed the door, and filled a pipe and sat down at his table and looked at the green and tranquil trees. The situation was unexpected. He ventured to suppose that the two Italian women would exhaust their vocal energy in the course of a few minutes, and that the door would be closed, and some peace return.

He picked up his pen and sat poised.

But he did not know the Latin race. The door remained open, and the argument continued. So did the infant playfulness. It had the inevitableness of youth.

Sefton began to fidget. He heard loud, admonishing exclamations. Hercules was addressed repeatedly. Hercules appeared to be the small boy with the wooden horse. He was a vigorous child.

"Hercules, Hercules, do not pull Maria's hair."

Then an infant began to give tongue, and one of the young women collected it and began to prance up and down the corridor, uttering strident and soothing noises and such language as all women use on these occasions. It was all very domesticated and natural, but not conducive to the production of literature, and Sefton began to be irritated. He got up and opened his door, and glared at the Italian woman with the baby. She took no notice of him at all.

Something would have to be done. Obviously. He closed his door, and went downstairs and sought out the manageress in her office. She was a little dark, compact person, suave, but with the beady and determined eye. Sefton was polite.

"Madam, you told me it was quiet on the fourth floor."

Madam looked surprised.

"Why, yes, it is very quiet."

"But — the children."

Madam looked yet more surprised.

"Why, yes, the children. But does monsieur object to children?"

Sefton felt himself accused, challenged by the basic sentiment of humanity.

"Unfortunately — I have to work."

"But there is a door; it is kept closed."

"It is not closed now."

"Monsieur can close it, if it is left open."

This was infinite condescension, but Sefton hesitated. He did not feel satisfied.

"Possibly you have another room?"

"The hotel is full. There will be no room vacant for a week."

Sefton returned to the fourth floor. Exercising moral force he went and closed the door which shut off the children's quarters, and, re-entering his room, sat down and prepared for the effort of re-inserting himself into literary serenity. He lit another pipe, and was picking up his pen when he heard that fatal door reopened.

Suddenly angry he got up, went out and closed it with emphasis. He had regained his own doorway when the door was reopened. The Italian woman surveyed him, laughed, and said something to the other nurse. A fussy English fellow. Mother of God, but the English were always so thin and red and irritable!

Sefton heard their laughter as he returned to his table, and to the view of the Borghese trees. He sat down. He supposed that the more sensitive and serious northerner must appear rather ridiculous to the deep-chested and voluble south. But, damn it, he would write in spite of those women! Should one be vanquished by a wrench's laughter?

He managed to stuff a willed silence into his ears. He wrote two pages of manuscript, but the angry concentration tired him. It was like planing wood against the grain.

Nor had the "Paradiso" and Rome finished with its attack upon Sefton's sensitive surface. He went to bed soon after ten; his doctor had warned him against late hours. The children were asleep, the

nurses silent, and the street became less full of hootings and the roarings of Fiat taxis. Sefton began to congratulate himself. He dozed off.

Bang! A hand had seized him by the scruff of the neck and dragged him back into consciousness.

Bang! His neighbour's door shook the flimsy wall. He heard a voice, and yappings of a little dog. The voice was a woman's and French. Translated it expressed the usual patter.

"Oh, my Poo-poo! Wow-wow-wow! Poo-poo kiss his dear Mumsy-mumsy!" And so on. The lady was a cheerful person who could talk to herself and a dog, and she talked as a Frenchwoman talks, as though her bedroom were a desert island. She opened drawers and shut them noisily. She walked about the room on high-heeled shoes that clattered and squeaked. The door of her wardrobe also had a squeak. She talked to Poo-poo. She put her shoes outside in the corridor, and closed the door with a crash.

Sefton sat up in bed, with a tight feeling in his stomach. He was flushed, trembling, furious. He switched on the light beside the bed and looked at his watch. Nine minutes to twelve! Damnation! Why couldn't the woman come to bed at a decent hour, and with a decent consideration for her neighbours!

The voice continued.

"Poor Poo-poo! Is my little darly-warling tired? Here is his nicy little bedsy."

Sefton uttered a "Good God," and, feeling hot and moist, bumped protestingly upon the partition wall. The protest was without effect, save that the Frenchwoman appeared to make more noise.

He lay down and tried to reason with himself. No use getting in a state over the affair. This was reality, life, progress. But as he lay there trying to will himself into resignation, he could feel his heart beating tensely, and the knotting of something in his stomach.

Would the woman come to bed at this hour every night? And during the day there would be the nurses and the children.

Well, he would have to change his hotel, find a quiet corner somewhere. It was only a question of finding the right place.

But for Sefton, a man who was made ill by noise, there seemed to be no right place in Rome, and the Paradiso was Rome in miniature.

Go where you would in Rome it continued to be the city of hideous noise. It was a vast playground swarmed over by grown-up children who blew tin trumpets and hailed Cæsar and the New Toy Imperialism.

Sefton waged war on the upper floor of the hotel. He might be foolishly sensitive, if not quite so truculent as Schopenhauer, but he had persistence, a streak of Mars. He wrote, but he wrote like a man recording a sonnet in the middle of Piccadilly Circus. He fought against the various domestic noises as he had fought against the fear and the fury of the trenches. It was war. Whenever that door in the corridor was left open by the Italian women, he went out and closed it. They had begun jestingly and gone on to open malice, but Sefton's persistence wore them down. He never said a word; he never looked at them when they met in the passage. His hatred of them remained hidden by a mask of apparent indifference. At the end of the fourth day they refrained from leaving the door open.

But Sefton had been writing and living under tension, and he was a sick man in the sense that his reserves were slender, almost as slender as his finances. On the fourth night when Madame Poo-poo woke him up with the crash of her door, he had a heart attack. He sat up in bed with his arteries drumming, and a sense of disaster impending over his soul.

"I must get out of this."

But where in Rome was he to get to? He had been exploring the Eternal City, but in the quarters where the foreign element resided he had been unable to find his *Via Sacra*. And after a night of broken sleep and mental exasperations, he found himself afraid of his little writing-table. He did not dare to sit down. He had a sudden feeling of helplessness in the face of the effort of grim concentration. He put on his hat and went out, and passing through the Golden Gate, sought for silence and green shadows in the Borghese. Was there any green and silent spot in Rome, or was everything Progress and the Great God Fiat?

He wandered under the stone pines. He sat about in the most solitary places, where the sunlight flickered and there was a sense of coolness and moisture; but the silence and the solitude were very thin. He explored still further. He passed through a great stone arch that held a blue distance framed in its tympanum; he found himself

on a terrace laid out with formal beds. There were some big white buildings down below. This part seemed but half decorated and more deserted. He wandered about under some scattered pines, and coming to a clump of ilex, found a little winding path that led him into a kind of shrubbery. And suddenly he discovered himself in a little space shut in by shrubs and trees; there was a seat, and on the seat a girl was sitting with a book and a packet of sandwiches.

She glanced up at him with an air of surprise and of reproach. She was a delicate-looking thing with large dark eyes and a slim throat. Her glance registered a protest. It was hostile. She saw in him man, the intruder, the destroyer of sanctuaries, the prophet of progress, the poet of petrol and of skyscrapers.

Sefton, instead of retreating, allowed shyness to urge him awkwardly to the other end of the seat. The girl edged to the opposite extremity with her book and her sandwiches. She looked English, and with an air of defensive aloofness she sat immersed in her novel.

Sefton began to feel uncomfortable. It occurred to him that she came here for silence, and solitude, and that he, in searching for the same old-world tranquillities had disturbed hers. He glanced at her a little apologetically. He stood up. He should have removed himself unobtrusively, but something moved him to speak to her, and to disappear as a man and not as a mere shadow.

He raised his hat.

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid I've blundered into your little sanctuary. I'll clear out."

She looked up at him, startled. She had a fear of strange men, but her eyes met Sefton's. She thought he looked very miserable, and so tired.

"Oh — it's not my private property."

He hesitated.

"But you found it first. You have the first mortgage. Rome is so devastating."

He still hesitated. He was poised there momentarily like a poor, obsolete god with draggled wings ready to take to flight. She had only to be silent or to reply with a few casual and commonplace words. But her face had changed its expression. It suggested the petals of a windflower opening to a shaft of unexpected sunlight.

"Yes — devastating. That's the very word. I've been searching

for it."

Her defensiveness had disappeared. She sat with the open book on her knees, looking a little expectant. He lingered.

"Yes, just a word. But this city is like a beautiful woman with a voice like a steam-saw. You'll excuse me; I ought not to have spoken to you——"

"No. But sometimes——"

"One does. Perhaps one has to. I'm sorry I disturbed you."

Again he waited for the hint that he should go, but she did not give it. She was looking up at him.

"Are you new to Rome?"

"Not quite a week."

"A holiday?"

"No, I came to work."

"I have been here two months."

"Working?"

"Yes."

He moved a little nearer to the seat. He hesitated.

"May I?"

She nodded. He sat down. A sudden feeling of inevitableness possessed him.

"What do you do in Rome?"

"I'm a typist and clerk at an agency. Miss Walker's agency."

She waited for him to respond.

"I see. And I write books. At present I am trying to write one on the top floor of an hotel, and next door to two Italian nurses and five children."

"Can you?"

"In fragments, and with much inward cursing. This morning I gave it up."

It was her turn to take up the chant.

"How horrible! I think I know. When I had been here a week I felt that I could not bear it. Nothing but noise, noise, noise all day and most of the night. It's like having sharp stones flung at one continually."

"Do you still feel like that?"

"Not quite so badly. I had to — to suppress something in myself, to let it go numb so to speak."

"But that's damnable. It's the sort of resignation that eats one's soul out. So you come here——"

"I bring my lunch here. No one else seems to come here. I suppose it is too quiet for Italians."

"Thank God."

She smiled faintly and looked at her wrist watch.

"I shall have to go. Our place is in the Piazza Barberini. Miss Walker's a dear. She's been through things."

He stood up.

"It's the crass, stupid, selfish thoughtlessness of the sensational people. I hope you'll forgive me. My name is Sefton."

"Mine is Millard."

She, too, stood up.

"There is nothing to forgive, is there? You were just looking for what I had found. I'll leave it to you."

He wanted to ask her if he might share it in the future, but he did not put the plea into words. He had a feeling that this little secret spot belonged to a mutual sympathy. And perhaps she understood.

Sefton went back to the Hotel Paradiso, and Ruth Millard to the agency overlooking the Piazza Barberini. Possibly the noises of Rome sounded less discordant now that each had found someone who suffered from those discords. But Sefton was unable to work; the will to work had deserted him; he was tired; he wanted to escape from the tension of effort. There are times when the self becomes so turgid and concentrated that it ceases to flow. He sat at his window and dreamed.

There was a voice that said: "I will go there again to-morrow."

He went, only to find that little secret place occupied by two lovers. They were kissing, and Sefton felt vaguely envious of their kisses. He retreated, to loiter up and down the path waiting for the girl to whom Rome was torment. Ridiculous, hypersensitive pair! What did those lovers care for street noises, and it was to lovers that the world looked.

He met Ruth Millard by a group of cypresses. He raised his hat.

"I'm sorry. We are ousted. Lovers."

His half whimsical smile excused the confession.

"Such people are privileged."

She, too, was smiling and looking past him.

"Oh — these two. Are they the ones?"

The man and the girl had emerged; youth's half-hour was up; they came towards and past Sefton and Ruth Millard, arms linked, smiling in each other's faces.

"Yes."

"They are there every day. They come out just about the time I arrive."

"So the sanctuary is ours."

Both of them divined the intimate implication, and neither of them questioned it. The coincidence had an inevitableness. They wandered on together and took possession of the seat among the Ilexes. Sefton noticed that she had brought no book with her.

He studied her face. It had a gentleness, which is rare in modern cities. She seemed to look at life questioningly. She was so unsure.

"How is the Piazza to-day?"

"We have three typewriters in the room I work in."

"So there is noise within and without."

"The noise you make yourself is never so bad as the noise made by other people. Besides — I'm used to typewriters. How's the hotel?"

"Just an hotel. I have not done any work to-day."

"Oh; couldn't you?"

"Submerged. Couldn't get my chin up, somehow. It's such a scuffle."

She brooded.

"Yes, a scuffle. They're so strong — those people."

"Vigorous children. We must be very old."

"Perhaps."

"Is it that we belong to a type that can't adapt to the new environment? We're not meant to survive. We shall go under in the thick of the crowd. We shall be ground up in the wheels of the machine."

She glanced at him a little wistfully.

"Really? But I don't feel ——"

"You think we have got into the wrong hutch."

She gave a little laugh.

"I don't know. I don't want to be ground up. There are museums left, you know."

"Say — zoological gardens. I wonder if there is a quiet cage to be found in Rome."

She had brought her lunch with her, a neat little parcel, and she untied the string.

"Do you mind?"

"Oh — please. It's your feeding-time. I take mine in the Paradiso monkey-house."

She reproved him.

"You sound bitter. One shouldn't be ——"

"I apologize. I'm not bitter, only exasperated. I have got a sore brain. But is there anywhere in Rome ——?"

She bit at a sandwich. She had good teeth.

"There must be, if you have the time to search, and can afford it."

"Yes — that's it."

She looked sympathetic.

"Can't you?"

"I could — within reason."

"Supposing I ask Miss Walker. She knows Rome like a book."

"Will you?"

"Of course."

They met every day in the boschetto, and Ruth would bring him addresses, and they would discuss Rome as a couple of birds might confer over the choosing of a nesting-place. The search began to have a double significance hardly appreciated at first by either of them, but growing insensibly. Man is the supreme egoist, but Sefton had the temperament of the artist, and the artist was tired of being no more and no less than himself. Rome had flung him into the thick of the crowd, and he had felt lost and crushed and rather helpless. His self-pity became sublimated into a more delicate divining of this girl's case. She was his counterpart. She had to scuffle for a living; she had an inherent gentleness; she had been pushed out of a needy suburban home in England, and the rudeness of life hurt her.

Sefton ceased to be single-minded. His consciousness began to double itself. He saw two persons where there had been one.

He took the addresses that Ruth brought him, and explored, and climbed endless staircases in high houses, but nothing quite pleased him until he discovered that house in one of the new areas. It was

one of a row of high new buildings in a very new and unfinished street, but on the top story he found a little flat with windows opening upon blue distances and the brown sea of Rome's roofs. Also it had a kind of roof-garden and loggia combined, where green things could be trained to scramble, and flowers made to bloom in vases and tubs. It had silence. The restless stir of the city was no more disturbing than the distant sound of the sea.

Sefton's Italian was patchy. The owner of the house lived on the ground floor, and their discussion of the matter in hand was inadequate. Sefton managed to make the Roman understand that he would return and bring an interpreter.

Ruth spoke Italian quite passably, and Ruth was taking to herself a new meaning. If Sefton were in love with the woman, he was also in love with the possible partner, an unexpectedly capable person with a gentle voice. He thought for himself and he thought for her, which meant that he was ripe for the right sort of mating.

Ruth was taken to see the flat, and to act as interpreter between Sefton and the proprietor, and when Ruth had seen the little kitchen and the salon and the two bedrooms, she was led out into the loggia to look at Rome.

She was enthusiastic.

"It's perfect, and quite reasonable. But you will need a servant."

"No; I shall do without a servant. Make my own morning coffee, and get my meals at a restaurant."

She thought the idea rather dreary and unintimate, but she did not say so. She did not like to make too many suggestions, because her new feeling for Sefton made her shy.

But when Sefton returned to the Paradiso and sat at the window of his lonely little room, he saw more than the trees of the Borghese. He saw Ruth as his wife at the top of that high building. He saw himself peacefully at work.

It was then that life began to hurt him, not with its noises and discords, but with other disharmonies. How could he, a man of five-and-thirty with old scars in his lungs, marry a healthy girl nearly ten years younger than himself? He was an exile. Marriage with him would make her an exile.

And did she care?

His sensitive conscience began to complicate the issue. He ought

not to give her a chance of caring. He ought to tell her just what he was.

But he wanted her to care. He wanted to make all sorts of excuses for letting her care. It would be so easy.

And then he fell into a sudden rage with himself.

"You selfish beast! You want to be comfortable. You want to persuade yourself that it would be pleasant to have a housekeeper. You want to feather your own nest."

But was it so? Was he not wanting certain things for Ruth's sake? Did he not care as he had never expected to care?

Well, if he cared, he would not condemn her to exile, and a partnership in which nine-tenths of the risk would be hers.

For three days he did not go near their meeting-place in the gardens of the Borghese. He left it to those two healthy Roman lovers. He envied them. He tried to feel ironical and dispassionate, and failed. He wandered restlessly about Rome, and lay in the grass among the ruins on the Palatine, and watched the afternoon crowds on the Pincio. A band made music; children played. He tried to convince himself that he was cut off from all these human, physical things. He had his craft; he was a writer of books, and nothing more.

Returning to the Paradiso he was handed a letter by the concierge.

"A lady left it, sir."

Sefton sat in the lounge and read her letter. Its brevity equalled its simplicity.

"Dear Mr. Sefton,
I hope you are not ill. I came to inquire.
Sincerely yours,
Ruth Millard."

Just those few words, seemingly so formal, and yet they moved him as no other words had ever done. They had a hidden meaning. They gave him the kind of courage that is supposed to inspire a man who leads a forlorn hope, and knows himself marked for a bullet. Why mess about and temporise, and let the business drift? He ought to tell her why he was in Italy.

He decided to tell her.

Next day he went to their old meeting-place, and found it empty and the lovers gone. He sat down on the seat to wait, but no Ruth appeared. The same thing happened the next day, and on the third day it rained. Sefton began to feel baulked and restless. Why had she given up going to her sanctuary? Was it possible that she was ill?

He decided to call at the English Agency in the Piazza Barberini. The agency was on the first floor, and on a glazed door at the top of a flight of stone steps Sefton saw Miss Walker's name. He knocked. He was aware of the clatter of typewriters. A voice said: "Come in."

He entered. Two girls seated at tables glanced at him inquiringly. He stood there holding his hat and looking shy.

"Excuse me, is Miss Millard in?"

No, Miss Millard was not at the office. Miss Millard was not very well, and Miss Walker had sent her to her lodgings. The girls looked at him with interest.

"Nothing serious, I hope? You see, I am a friend of Miss Millard."

The girls did not think it was serious. They knew that Ruth Millard had appeared worried and troubled and "funny" during the last few days, but they could not tell Sefton so. He might be the cause of it. Very probably he was the cause of it.

Sefton thanked them and disappeared. He went back to the Paradiso and wrote a letter, and carried his letter to the back street in the Ludovisi quarter where Ruth had a bed-sitting room. He thought it a very dismal street, and the Italian woman who opened the door looked equally dismal.

"The Signorina Millard?"

He handed the woman the letter, and she examined it rather like a melancholy monkey fingering a piece of waste paper.

"*Si*, signore."

"Give it to her, please."

He went away, and the Italian woman carried the letter up to the fourth floor, and opened the door of a back room. Ruth was lying in the bed, with the shutters closed. Her face looked dim and vague.

"A letter. A gentleman left it."

She placed Sefton's letter on the table beside the bed, and Ruth did not move until the door had closed. She sat up and looked at the

envelope. It was as though she was afraid of it. She gazed at it for quite a long while before she had the courage to open and read it.

"Dear Ruth,

I have been worried. I have not seen you for so long. I must see you, because I have something to tell you. It is something about myself. I ought to have told you earlier, but I did not realize then that the thing would lie heavy on my soul.

If you can be kind, and are well enough, and it is not raining, please come to the Borghese to-morrow. I shall be there every day at twelve.

Yours ever sincerely,

Sefton."

When she had read his letter she looked frightened. What was it that he had to tell her? It could not be as unhappy as the thing she felt it her duty to tell him? She had had sudden panic. Her conscience matched his, and a worrying conscience can produce a pain that is more fretting than any physical ache. She sat and brooded. Yes, she would have to go, and she would have to tell him.

The following day was fine, fresh and rain-washed, with the tops of the stone pines very green against the blue of the sky. Ruth passed through the Golden Gate, and, entering the Borghese, paused by the railings above the riding-track to look at the Roman crowd. There were nurses on the seats and children, and old men. Two girls and three Italian cavalry officers were cantering round the earth track. A groom was placing a small boy on a pony. People lounged and looked at each other and gossiped. It seemed a happy, careless, sun-loving crowd.

Ruth went on towards the rendezvous, feeling that life was a bitter business, and that parents who brought unfit children into the world were the worst sort of sinners, for they tempted you to lie about yourself when a lie might mean marriage. Like Sefton she had to love nakedly and with a clear conscience, and in marriage you gave yourself either as a rotten vessel or a whole one. And if he asked her to marry him——?

She came to the path leading in among the ilexes. She felt weak at the knees. If only she could shirk, keep her secret as dozens of

women would have done had they been in her place. The shadows of the ilexes fell across her. She had a sudden glimpse of the seat and of Sefton sitting there.

He rose quickly to meet her. His eyes looked strained. He was not at his ease.

"Thank you for coming."

She sat down. She had to sit down. She was feeling breathless.

"I have something to tell you."

"I have something to tell you."

They uttered the words simultaneously, and then sat gazing at each other rather like two people who have tried to sit on the same chair.

"Sorry. May I begin?"

She faltered. Well, perhaps he had better begin. She would have to hear what he had to say. It might be about the flat, or his work — anything but the problem that lay heavy over her heart.

"Yes. But — perhaps ——"

"I have never told you why I came to Rome. I had to come out here because I'm not fit to spend the winter in England. I have had a chest. They say I may be all right if I keep out of England in the winter."

He was not looking at her while he spoke, but when he had made the confession he turned to glance at her face. It held him surprised and silent. Her eyes had a strange dilated look as though some sudden wonderful thing had been shown her. She was not looking at him, but at the dark foliage of the ilexes.

He wondered. Why did she look like that? Didn't she guess what lay behind his confession?

He said: "I had to tell you. It's pretty rotten to be a wretched crock. Because — you see, I've come to care for you rather much. Of course, that might mean nothing."

Suddenly she seemed to come to life, and to emerge from her stillness. She put out a hand and touched his sleeve.

"Oh, Dick ——! It's too wonderful."

"Why?"

"Why! Oh — my dear, I'm what you call a wretched crock — also. My people managed to send me out here."

"What — you have had the same trouble?"

"Yes."

"But you ought not to be in an office."

"I had to try and do something. My father's only a managing clerk in a solicitor's office, and there are five of us. I felt I had to take a working job."

Half-an-hour ago two other lovers had been sitting on that seat, but they did not look at life as did these two exiles.

"Ruth, don't you see? If we choose not to have children, why, there is nothing to prevent us. Why, it's perfectly splendid! You'll come out of that office. There's the flat, and plenty of fresh air and sunshine. I can manage for both."

She let her head rest gently against his shoulder.

"But the risk, Dick? Supposing I got ill again? I should feel so ——"

"It's a mutual risk, dear. Loneliness kills people, you know, and boredom, and having no one who cares."

"Yes, caring must help."

"I rather believe it's the elixir of life."

Six Months to Live

WHEN MR. JAMES CALLENDAR OPENED THE GLASS-PANELLED DOOR of the office of Callendar, Tebbs and Hartley — Solicitors — Rutley, the commissionaire noticed that Mr. Callendar was carrying his umbrella in an unusual way. The umbrella was wet and Mr. Callendar's right hand grasped its middle. Usually he carried the umbrella by the handle, much as a beau of the old days carried his flowered cane and as though the silver top contained a phial of sweet-scented essence that could be raised modishly to the beau's nostrils. For Callendar was a bachelor and a man of routine. Rutley had known him to do the same things and to do them in the same way for the last fifteen years. His hats and his ties and his air of austere shyness had seemed never to vary. But on this January morning he appeared gripping that wet umbrella as though he held something by the throat.

"Good morning, sir."

Rutley got off his stool, but Mr. Callendar was looking with an air of vacancy at the church spire showing through the window above Rutley's bald head.

"Morning, Rutley. Mr. Tebbs here yet?"

Rutley's stolidity varied seldom. Mr. Callendar was an hour late. And, of course, Mr. Tebbs was here. Mr. Tebbs had been interviewing one of Mr. Callendar's clients, a fussy gentleman up from Surrey whom Mr. Callendar should have been propitiating.

"Mr. Iremonger's come and gone, sir. Mr. Tebbs saw him."

"Just as well. You might tell Mr. Tebbs I'm here and that I should like to see him when he can spare the time."

Mr. Callendar walked down the long, dark passage towards his private room, still gripping that umbrella like a man carrying a furled flag. He kept his hat on. Rutley saw him pause outside the door of Mr. Hartley's room and Rutley's curiosity was aroused, because Mr. Callendar's movements had always been as precise and

unvaried as those of a clockwork figure. Never had there been hesitations, vacancies, pausings; and Rutley, pursuing the simile of the clockwork figure, was led to the fanciful impression of Mr. Callendar as a mechanism that had run itself down.

"Works too hard. Always did."

Mr. Callendar went on into his own room and closed the door and the commissionaire delivered the senior partner's message to Mr. Tebbs.

"Mr. Callendar's here, sir. Wants to see you — if you can spare the time."

Gordon Tebbs was never in a hurry, though his deliberation suggested something well oiled and balanced. He was ruddy. He had very black hair and very dark eyes. He had never been seriously ill; he enjoyed life as he enjoyed a cigar or his golf; he was a happy, healthy pagan.

When he walked into a room he seemed to cock his coat-tails. Almost you expected him to crow, for his redness was the redness of a cock's comb.

"Morning — Callendar."

He closed the door and gave the figure in the revolving chair one of his dark, deliberate and jocund glances. Callendar's hands were resting on the arms of the chair, the long, white fingers extended. He was looking out of the window at a slate roof that was a shade greyer than the sky in the congealed gloom of an English winter. His face had a dreaminess, a look of strange and gentle surprise, as though he had been asleep for twenty years and had been awakened to a world of unfamiliar mystery.

"That you — Gordon. Sit down. I have a few things to tell you."

But Mr. Tebbs did not sit down. He stood on the hearthrug with his back to the fire. He, too, felt himself confronting an unusualness in James Callendar and he eyed him as he might have eyed a golf ball badly tucked up in a bunker. Callendar had lost all his crispiness. He looked fagged.

"A little below par, James?"

Callendar, smiling faintly, raised his eyes to the ridge of the grey roof.

"We're a very tired people, Gordon. I think I was beginning to realize it. It's this tiredness that's at the bottom of our unrest. We've

led the world — more or less — for a century. The war tried us a lot ——"

Tebbs, standing square to the fire, looked everything but tired.

"You want a holiday, old man. I've always said ——"

"I'm taking a holiday ——"

"Sound business. I've always said you kept your nose too close to the grindstone. A couple of months in the sun ——"

Callendar's eyes came to rest on his partner's face. They still seemed to express a gentle and half-amused surprise and they aroused in Gordon Tebbs a queer feeling of uncertainty, a sense of seeing something strange and yet not seeing it quite clearly. Like an argument that you could not follow or a piece of foggy transcendental philosophy. He put on his pragmatical expression and became emphatic.

"A couple of months in the sun — somewhere. Why don't you go to Madeira? You'll come back ——"

Callendar appeared to be looking through the wall above his partner's head.

"I'm not coming back, Gordon."

"What — retiring?"

"Yes, in a way. I have only six months or so to live."

His partner looked sincerely shocked. He had an affection for Callendar, more of an affection than he had realized, for old Jim was a white man. He was so reliable, a little dry perhaps, but full of a quiet and patient magnanimity. An unselfish sort of beggar. A fellow who had always had his pockets full of the other people's troubles and foolishnesses. He had had to help to keep two married sisters and to educate a young milord of a brother.

"Six months! But, my dear old chap ——"

"Something in the throat, Gordon. Gone much further than I thought it had. Wasn't bothering. I'm not bothering — now. It won't matter — much — to anybody."

"But — my dear old chap!"

"You hadn't noticed anything?"

"Can't say that I had. Just a little huskiness ——"

James Callendar smiled.

"Just a little huskiness."

II

CALLENDAR booked a "sleeper" on the Rome express. During his last week in England he came daily to the city office and sat in his accustomed chair. He made his will, he signed the deeds dissolving the partnership, he interviewed a few old clients and handed over to his partners the various professional affairs for which he had been responsible.

His calmness was astonishing. Not only did he appear to have accepted the inevitable, but there was a kind of brightness in his eyes. Almost, he had the air of a man who had uttered a sigh of relief and whose tired spirit had folded its wings. He seemed utterly unafraid.

Rutley, a warm-hearted creature, spoke of it with awe and in a voice that tended to drop to a thick whisper.

"Six months. Believe me, he's less upset about it than any of us. Makes you feel queer when he walks in and you hear a voice inside you saying: 'That's Mr. Callendar, a man who's going to die.' And he's going for a holiday, just as though he was going down to Brighton for the week-end. Makes you marvel. It's religion — I suppose. He's one of the quiet, serious sort."

The most astonishing thing to the live man was the doomed man's smile. It was a new smile, gentle and quite effortless. It was neither sad nor happy; it was the kind of smile that is seen on a sufferer's face when a spasm of pain has passed. It had something of mystery; it was like a light seen dimly and indistinctly. It gave to Gordon Tebbs's voice an emotional quality when he spoke of it to his wife.

"You know the sort of light you see on a face in an old picture? Just like that. It makes me wonder. You'd think he was glad."

"Perhaps he is."

But the man of the jocund eyes could not understand such gladness.

"He's not a religious chap. Work was his religion. And he's never enjoyed life. Always — work — work. Never was in love — I gather. He had to keep those two sisters for years and educate a young cub of a brother. But for the last five years he could have enjoyed things. He's only forty-seven and he's leaving a private income of seven

hundred a year."

England was in a sleety mood when the boat-train pulled out of Victoria station. Callendar sat in his Pullman seat and watched the sodden suburbs pass into the still more sodden fields. It was a grey country and he was going away into the sunlight, and into his eyes came that quiet and mysterious smile. Probably he did not realize that his life had been a very grey one, a laborious and dusty affair, for he had had nothing with which to compare its unselfish monotony. His consciousness had remained undifferentiated.

In fact his life had been so quiet and humdrum that when that fatal judgment had been delivered to him he had taken it with supreme quietness. He had been conscious of no shock. He had felt no fear.

A calm voice had said within him: "My friend, you are going to die," and he had listened to the voice and replied with tranquillity: "Oh, very well. I'll make a note of it." He had gone out holding that umbrella by the middle.

For — after all — what had he to live for? He had never known life's more passionate urges; the flesh in him did not rebel. His spirit consented, as it had always consented, sitting down to the daily routine in an office chair. The man in Callendar had forgotten to insist upon its essential manhood. Besides, Tony — his younger brother — was qualified and established in a country practice, and Iruna and Kate — his sisters — had ceased to be daughters of misfortune. He had settled money on them. Having collected more money than he needed, he had ceased to need it. He mattered to no one in particular. He did not matter very supremely to himself.

The car attendant came to his table.

"Are you taking lunch, sir?"

Callendar came out of his musings for a moment.

"Yes, please."

He relapsed again into reflection. Obviously the normal daily routine would go on, the material happenings that the body demanded, though he had come to feel that his doomed shell was a superfluity. He would have to go on washing it and feeding it and putting it to bed, until such a time as the doctors and the nurses should take final charge of it from him and relieve him of all responsibility.

The gloomy landscape drifted by.

Would there be much pain?

But why think of it? He had had no pain as yet and the doctor had told him that these throat cases were — at times — extraordinarily painless. He would just grow thin and shrivel up.

"Let's leave it at that," he said to himself; "I'm going to Rome. Eternity — and the Eternal City!"

Only twice in his life had Callendar been abroad, once — after passing his final — when he had gone tramping with a friend in the Austrian Tyrol; and again — a year or two later — when he had spent a fortnight in Normandy. But that was nearly twenty years ago and, like many professional men, he had become the slave of the career that he had created. His holidays had been provincial and unexciting, a week's fishing, or ten days' golf on some seaside course, or a few days spent with his sisters. Work had absorbed him. He had grown dull and content with his dullness, his club, his flat at Notting Hill, his daily comings and goings, the quiet and sedulous attention to business.

It had occurred to him that he would miss the daily routine — but when a man has but six months to live the loss of the old interest must seem a very transient consideration. But one aspect of the change had not revealed itself to him. He had not set out in search of the unexpected, and the legal surface of his mind had received very few impressions that could be described as unexpected. He had accepted the inevitable. Like an old man, he had asked to be allowed to sit for a little while in the sun and to see Rome before he died. Rome was a lawyer's city. Always it had had a distant glamour for him. *Pax Romana; lex Romana.*

He did not foresee — or forefeel. . . .

But the first glimmerings, a kind of strange stirring of his self, happened when he raised the blind of his "sleeper" and saw mountains, snow, peaks flushing with the dawn, black pine woods, a river rushing over rocks. In his blue-and-white pyjama suit he stood and gazed. He had the "sleeper" to himself, and yet suddenly he had a feeling that there was another man standing beside him in that narrow space.

"Magnificent!"

He uttered the word and it surprised him. It was as though some

other self had uttered it.

III

CALLENDAR had reserved a room at the Hôtel Eliseo in the Via Porto Pinciana. The hotel was a small one; it had been recommended to him for its comfort, its reasonable charges and its view, for towards the Via Pinciana the upper windows overlooked the Borghese.

Arriving very late at night he found Rome sleeping, but restlessly so, for in these post-war days the Romans never seem to sleep. Taxis and trains make of the night a bowl of black glass that is broken eternally upon the pavements of progress. But Callendar was very tired. He went up to his third-floor room and slept in spite of motor-cars and argumentative Latins.

He woke with a sense of freshness. He got out of bed and, unfastening a shutter, pushed it back to uncover a miraculous picture. The stealth of the dawn still glided in and out among the trees. He found himself looking at a stretch of the old red Aurelian wall and, beyond it, into the greenness of the Borghese, with its grassy spaces and its stately trees. The sunlight was dispersing a thin white mist. It shone upon the tops of the huge stone pines, the ilexes, the cypresses. Dim hills floated against a sky of a soft blueness. And to the left lay, apart of Rome, the Pincio, the Villa Medici, St. Peter's, the Janiculum.

Callendar stood and gazed.

"Wonderful!"

Yes, it was very wonderful and, for the first time since judgment of death had been passed upon him, he was conscious of a little tremor, a spasm of inward pain, a kind of vague yearning.

The day was young, but he had no wish to go back to his bed. Doomed he might be, but he was a live man, standing upright; and as he glanced at the bed he seemed to see it as a flat, white surface upon which a stiff, straight figure would soon be lying. Death, with its lower jaw tied up and its eyes carefully closed!

Something stirred in him. He crossed the room and rang the bell, and, returning to the window, watched the sunlight on those Roman trees.

Someone knocked at the door.

"Hot water, please — and coffee."

Callendar had some French, but no Italian; and young Italy does not ask to be addressed in French. English is preferred, especially American-English.

" 'Ot water, sir. Cer-tain-lee."

Callendar was shaving himself when he seemed to become intimately and strangely aware of his face as his own face. He had looked at it in a mirror each morning, but on this Roman morning he looked at it differently. So — that — was James Callendar! His age was forty-seven. He had quite a youngish look. There was very little grey in his brownish hair; he had a good skin, clear eyes, no stringiness about the throat.

"I'm going to die," he thought.

It seemed rather incredible. He could smell hot coffee. The tray was waiting on the table by the window, with a plate of rolls and a dish of butter.

He felt hungry.

Having finished his shaving, he sat down at the table and enjoyed the coffee and rolls; while, beyond the old red Roman wall the sunlight grew stronger and the sky more blue. The stone pines threw shadows. The tall trees seemed to wrap themselves in a deep tranquillity.

Somewhere below a man was singing, and Callendar rose and stood at the window. Between the street and the old wall a florist had his garden and a gardener in patched blue trousers was carrying out pink and white azaleas and placing them in a row ready for transport to some shop. The man was singing. He had a right to sing. He was young and the spring was coming.

Callendar felt strangely mocked.

IV

HE HAD thought of Rome as a city of the memorable dead, or forgotten Popes and Cæsars, of palaces in ruins, of marble and alabaster and the red robes of cardinals. He found it a city of life and, like life, full of intoxicating contrasts. It is the living who matter, not the dead. Funeral bells are out of fashion. And young Rome is flamboyant and noisy, and its sacred chariot is the motorcar and its

god a youth in a black shirt.

Callendar was astonished — and more than astonished. The raw and galliard youth of the city was provoking. It was a city of infinite beauty and of dreadful discords.

He wandered. He was jostled. And about the sunset hour on his first day he stood by Bemins fountain and looked past the diminished colour of the flower-stalls up the grey sweep of the Spanish steps. He went slowly up the steps and towards the ilexes outside the Villa Medici. He looked over Rome.

He heard Rome, modern Rome.

In the dusk it sounded to him like a zoo gone mad, full of frightened and bleating beasts, or like an immense playground where thousands of vigorous children were blowing tin trumpets. It was a chaos of hooting cars, an increasing noise that was childish and horrible and ridiculous.

He was shocked.

For he had come to Rome to sit in the sunlight and to spread his hands consentingly towards the fate that the gods had chosen for him. He had come, as it were, to contemplate death in a city of the mighty and the memorable dead; and death was not here — but the living.

Yes; raw, red-lipped, eager life — swaggering, urgent and vociferous. It clashed cymbals and blew trumpets and beat drums. It was full of elemental vibrations and their effect upon Callendar was distressful. He felt that he had no right to be disturbed by this human vitalism; and yet he was disturbed by it, a pale and dusty St. Anthony in the sudden presence of a crowd of southern girls.

Yes, it seemed symbolical.

He turned back from under the massive gloom of the ilexes and retraced his steps. He descended into the Piazzi di Spagna. He was turning into the Via Condotti, keeping close to a shop window to let one of the red trams grind its way past him in that narrow space, when a woman accosted him. She was dark and pale; she had queer, glittering eyes; she thrust her elbow against his body.

Callendar walked on quickly.

"La belle dame sans merci," he thought.

Troubled and depressed, he returned to his hotel.

V

WHEN a man walks into a hotel dining-room and sits by himself at a little table in a corner, he is challenging observation and Callendar was observed.

To the women who sat on either side of the doorway he appeared as a tall, spare man with a thoughtful face, rather shy eyes and an air of aloofness. He was sufficiently young to be interesting. Since his Oxford days, he had been well tailored.

Also, he walked across the yellow carpet of the white dining-room as though going to his own particular corner in his London club. He had an air of dissociation and seemed unaware of human eyes. That he was a sick man was not apparent. When he spoke to his waiter or to the *maître d' hôtel* his voice had a slight huskiness, but to strangers its blurred timbre sounded natural.

"Legal — my dear."

"Or — a doctor."

"No; a little too dry — I think."

He was a man of detail with an orderly mind. When he removed himself after dinner to the lounge and sat in one of the deep plum-coloured arm-chairs whose padded arms were protected with lace mats that were for ever getting disarranged, he would smooth out these lace covers. He would smoke one cigarette with an air of leisurely primness. He sat and read Hare's "Rome," not as though he enjoyed it, but rather like a professional man conscientiously reading a lease or a will.

That he could be of any interest to women was a possibility unrealised by him. Still more impossible would it have seemed that he could be interested in a woman. Such vexings of the spirit were the privilege or the curse of live people, and Callendar had come to Rome feeling like a man who was dead. Or as a ghost of a man permitted to walk the earth for a little while before vanishing into some other dimension.

The Hôtel Eliseo was very full. If you dined early you had a chance of obtaining a comfortable chair and Callendar dined to the minute. The fullness of the hotel did not concern him. He did not notice people. He was like a ghost moving among a number of solid humans. At least, that is how he behaved and felt until the

eternal liveness of Rome somehow seemed to reinfect him with a new vitality. It happened on the third day that he opened his eyes and looked at people. He was feeling a little lonely.

He observed his neighbours at the other tables or in the lounge. Mostly they were women and elderly women, English, American, Colonial. There was an Italian family that talked like a public demonstration. An elderly son dined brightly with a decrepit mother and aunt. There were two young things seeing Rome with a conscientious father. Also, life was not lacking. Smartness flashed here and there like a precious stone in a dull setting.

Callendar could not help observing the two women who shared a table by one of the white pillars. They were just out of earshot, but well within range of an exchange of glances. They were very smart women. They came in late to all meals. They ordered special dishes. They were a source of anxiety to the head waiter.

One was small and thin and yellow-headed and restless. Her lips were narrow and red. She threw hard and blue-eyed glances about the room, and was always fidgeting and posturing and touching things on the table with little, affected gestures. A feverish woman, sharp, silly, cruel, greedy. Her friend and *vis-à-vis* had one of those formless faces of a bluish-red, with exuding brown eyes and a mouth that was always unbuttoned. She looked heavily amiable — to herself — perhaps — more than to others. Her smartness suggested effort. She had a very unfinished physical product to polish, and she was a woman who would wear the latest thing in hats even though the hat should set on her head like a shako knocked out of shape. The little woman was a Mrs. Pym, the fully fleshed friend a Miss Gubbins. Unfortunate patronymic. They knew Callendar's name long before he knew theirs. There are women who will ask a concierge any sort of question.

But it did occur to Callendar — it had to occur to him — that these two women contrived to be a good deal in his vicinity. They asserted themselves in his corner of the lounge. At meals he was always meeting the restless and questioning blue eyes of Mrs. Pym.

They had marked him down. He was the one solitary man of a possible age in the Hôtel Eliseo.

They talked a great deal and for the benefit of the world at large.

"Oh, my dear, that new Venus at the Diocletian is simply — a dream."

For Callendar read his Rome religiously. And you had to consider a man's prejudices, though a man who wears a decently cut dinner-jacket and a tie tied by himself should be of more use at the "Excelsior" than in a museum.

"My dear — wasn't it lovely last night?"

"Yes, the little *capitano* ——"

"Rather too monkeyish, my dear. Too much shimmy-shimmy. I prefer to dance English."

It was obvious to them both that Callendar should be able to dance. A man with a Savile Row cut to his coat! And an unattached man, too — and probably a bachelor. So Mrs. Pym dropped her cigarette case close to Callendar's feet and waited till Callendar had to pick it up for her.

"Thanks — so much."

She turned on her glitter.

"Do have one — won't you — for the trouble."

So Hare had to be laid upon the table between the coffee cups and the chase was begun.

But Mrs. Pym had other responsibilities. She was a widow, but the mother of two children — Eileen and Pam, who resided on the top floor of the Hôtel Eliseo and came down to meals with their governess three-quarters of an hour before their elders. Callendar had noticed the children, two quiet little bob-headed things. He had not paid any attention to Una Summerhayes, the governess.

But, coming in rather tired one morning after wandering about the Palatine, he was sitting in the lounge opposite the glass doors of the dining-room when Mrs. Pym's children and their governess came out.

Callendar happened to glance up. The governess was looking over the heads of the children into the lounge. She was a dark girl, in age about eight-and-twenty, tall and well made. Her face was full and pleasant, with large brown eyes. But it was the expression upon her face that arrested Callendar's attention and stirred in him a sudden consciousness of life — as he had not known it.

The girl was afraid.

At least — that was his impression. She came out through the glass

doors of the dining-room like a large-eyed and timid creature emerging from a cage. It was as though she feared something in the sedate and comfortable little lounge, but what that something could be Callendar could not conjecture.

Anyway, he was staring rather hard at her and suddenly her eyes sank to his with a flicker of resentment and shyness. She seemed to flinch. She went quickly by him after the two children as though she feared that he was going to speak to her.

He noticed one or two details. Her skin had a pallor that was not the pallor of perfect health. She wore her dark hair bobbed and it needed the attention of a hairdresser, having been allowed to grow too long. Her beige-coloured knitted coat fitted her badly. Obviously it was a cheap article and probably she could not afford a better.

But the picture of her frightened, flinching face remained with him and seemed to grow more vivid and challenging when Mrs. Pym and her friend came in late to lunch and threw smiles in his direction and twittered and preened themselves like a couple of paroquets.

Some men retain a kind of boyish innocence to the end of their days, and Callendar was that sort of man; but as a lawyer he had had his experience of women, even of the yellow-haired, meagre, predatory type as represented by Mrs. Pym. She was a very vain little woman and a very hard one. It would appear that something had annoyed her. She called up the head waiter, with the menu held in one sharp-fingered hand, rated him and the cuisine.

"It is perfectly absurd. Veal and macaroni every other day. Have an omelette cooked at once."

The man was very polite, malignantly polite.

"We are not Italians — you know."

"I will order an omelette for madame."

He was moving off when she called him back.

"Send in one of the page-boys. I want a message taken."

The page-boy was sent in and stood, cap in hand, beside Mrs. Pym's chair.

"Go up to Number Eighty-three and tell the English girl I wish to speak to her. Understand?"

He understood neither her English nor her Italian and the head

waiter had to be called in to interpret. Meanwhile, Callendar was busy eating macaroni and grated cheese and was keeping his eyes from the other table. This little bully of a woman was making him feel uncomfortable, and he understood the feelings of the head waiter who was a man and an Italian.

A moment later he realized that Mrs. Pym was addressing him. Her voice was a different voice, thinly gay and gracious.

"People — are — trying — aren't they? I — do — hate making complaints — but sometimes one has to."

"Of course," he agreed.

She smiled across at Miss Gubbins.

"A morning of rows, my dear. We had a row with a wretched cabman who wanted to charge us ten lire for driving us from St. Peter's. In England — we should have sent him to prison for daring to come out with such a horse."

Callendar saw the governess entering by the glass doors. She came up the room, walking very quickly, with a queer set look on her face. She stood beside Mrs. Pym's table, her brown eyes fixed upon the top of Mrs. Pym's bright head.

"You sent for me?"

Mrs. Pym's face seemed to sharpen. She did not trouble to look at the girl.

"Miss Summerhayes, did I see you in the Via Nationale this morning with Eileen and Pamela?"

Callendar, suddenly and intensely interested, watched the girl's face.

"Yes. The children — wanted — to look at the shops."

Mrs. Pym kept her standing there for a moment in silence.

"Didn't I give you orders — that the children were to go to the gardens?"

"I think you did."

"You think! You will do what I tell you — in the future. That's all."

Miss Summerhayes reddened and Callendar felt himself flushing in sympathy. She gave one downward glance at Mrs. Pym's head and walked away from the table, looking over the heads of the people as though she wished to forget that they were there. The head waiter hurried to open the door for her, for he, too, knew

what it was to be politely mute. She gave him a faint smile.

Mrs. Pym was examining the contents of her wine bottle. You could not trust foreigners when a cork had been drawn.

"Someone has been at it again."

"Oh — I don't think so — really," said her friend, who was not all leather.

Callendar was remembered and appealed to.

"I'm afraid I'm a bit of a disciplinarian."

He met her eyes, and was silent for a moment.

"Is it — necessary — in public?"

His voice had a sharp gentleness, and she opened her blue eyes rather wide at him. And then she gave a little acid laugh.

"You men — are — so sentimental."

Callendar made no reply, and for the rest of the meal there was silence between the two tables, but Callendar was not feeling silent. Did a woman like Mrs. Pym enjoy humiliating a girl in public? And why did certain women do that sort of thing? It was pretty beastly. And he was conscious of an urgent desire to tell that little fashionable virago exactly how beastly her behaviour had been. You might employ a young woman to look after your children and drag her about the continent with you and perhaps pay her a wretched salary, but when it came to scolding her in public. . . . Yet, after all, what business was it of his?

He hurried through the rest of the meal and went out into the lounge. Business — indeed! But he had not come to Rome on business. He was a man with death in his body. And yet he felt himself most strangely concerned about that girl. It was as though she appealed to him somehow in a way that was astonishing and sudden and unexpected. He stood looking at himself in a mirror, but he was not aware of his own reflection. He was thinking of a pair of frightened brown eyes and a sensitive face that flinched.

What a beast that woman was!

Turning to ascend the three steps that led to the vestibule, he became aware of the girl talking to the manageress, a little woman with kind, bright eyes. He paused at the bottom of the steps and saw Miss Summerhayes go towards the stairs.

"Thank you, signora, you are always very kind."

"Poor child! Her voice ended on an emotional note and Cal-

lendar, watching her disappear up the stairs, wondered how many people — or how few — had been kind to her.

VI

NEXT morning he spoke to Mrs. Pym's children. He found them in the lounge, sitting side by side on a settee, their heads close together over a month-old copy of the *Graphic*.

He asked them how they liked Rome and whether they had any wish to see Mussolini. Eileen, the elder, a beautiful and softened edition of her mother, showed him gentle eyes.

"We like Rome — very much — thank you. But we'd rather see the wolves at the Capitol."

"Well — and why not?"

"We are waiting for Miss Summerhayes. Mother won't let us go anywhere but into the gardens."

"There's the Zoo ——"

"Oh, we've been there. It's lovely. Summer — I mean Miss Summerhayes — is going to take us there again. Oh, here she is."

Callendar turned with a smile and a slight bow to a girl who appeared loth to acknowledge either. He was just a strange man in a foreign hotel who had chosen to interest himself in Mrs. Pym's children, and Una Summerhayes seemed to be in a great hurry to get the children away from him. Her eyes had that same anxious look. She shepherded the children out of the lounge, giving Callendar the impression that she was refusing to allow herself to be aware of him. It was not a deliberate rebuff, but an evasion, a flight and, being such, it failed in its essential purpose.

The two children gave him backward and friendly glances and, when they and their "Summer" had vanished, Callendar wandered out into the Roman sunlight and, passing through the Porta Pinciana, entered the Borghese. On the seats under the tall pines, old men and gaily dressed nurses watched the children at play. Cars streamed in and out of the gates. Idle people were leaning on the wooden rails, watching Rome taking its saddle exercise. Here were officers and Roman dandies, and dogs, and smartly dressed women, and dark-eyed girls, and children — the soft-voiced, piquant, Roman children.

Callendar found a place on one of the green seats. And suddenly this life of Rome — on horseback and on foot, with the voices of its children and the hooting of its cars — made him realise that he had ceased to be a live man in the sense that he could count on life. He was a potential corpse sitting on a seat, death among the children and the young girls and these proud-fleshed men and women. He was conscious of a chilliness, of an impulse to resist and to escape. He ceased to be the tired and consenting acceptor of his fate. A new awareness of life seemed born in him, a sensitiveness to colour, sounds, perfumes. And all this would pass. Or rather — it would continue; while he — and his consciousness of life — would vanish. Youth would still be youth and children would play under the trees, and red wine would be poured into glasses, and horses would gallop, and men would follow women and mate with them.

The man in him — the man of twenty years ago — cried out: "Bless me — too — even me — oh — my Father." It was a bitter cry, and he sat and felt afraid because of the strength of the yearning in him. No longer did he seem able to fold his arms and sink resignedly into the deep waters. His impulse was to struggle, to fight for the sunlight and for air and all that beautiful life.

For — life was beautiful. He seemed to realise it suddenly, the colour and the galliard emotions, the desiring, the possessing. And what had he done with life? Sat in a chair and pushed papers about a table, and been dustily and meticulously efficient over other people's affairs. He had not lived. He was going to lose all this beautiful consciousness of things without having enjoyed that consciousness. The love in the eyes of a woman, great music, the climbing of peaks, the flush and the scent of the rose, the clinging together of lovers. . . .

He trembled.

He felt — somehow — that he had to escape from this yearning and so tire himself by walking that life's urge would become exhausted and the spirit in him limp and resigned. He got up. He walked rapidly along the path until he came to a place where four roads met. Across the way he saw a grey wall, an open gate, old trees spreading a sense of green shadowiness and gloom. He felt a desire to cool his sudden fever under the shadows of the trees.

He crossed the road and, entering the gateway, had beauty flung

at him like an intoxicating and subtle perfume. He was in a place that was half park, half garden and looking along a walk shaded by high trees. At the end of the vista the arch of a stone gateway framed the soft blueness of distant trees and hills. It was like looking through a window into some other world that floated beyond your reach in mysterious and Elysian distances.

Callendar stood and gazed. He thought: "What a strange thing is consciousness — my consciousness. Thousands of eyes have looked at the landscape through that arch and felt it theirs — in consciousness. But the heart stops beating — and the eyes shrivel — and, for me, all the world will be dead."

He walked on under the trees. The shade was very deep and yet he was conscious of the sunlight striking the upper foliage. Ahead of him, between the tree trunks, he saw water shining, with water-birds paddling in the sunlight; and on the edge of it a scattering of children and nursemaids and men and women who had come out to bask and to stare. He turned towards the lake. Close by, under an ilex, a girl was sitting on a seat with a book on her knees and two children were throwing pieces of bread to the birds.

Callendar came to an abrupt pause. The children were Mrs. Pym's children and the girl, Una Summerhayes. And, standing there in the shade of the high trees, he allowed himself to suppose that this was her particular seat and that she came here regularly with the children. He thought, too, that she looked almost as lonely as he felt and his impulse was to go and sit down on that seat beside her.

He wanted to talk to her. He wanted to see those brown eyes lose their look of anxiety and fear. He knew that he would like to hear her telling him things.

He was on the edge of a love affair and did not realize it — he, a man who had some twenty-odd weeks to live.

VII

THE two children had scampered off to the other side of the lake when Callendar, coming from behind the seat, stood so that his shadow fell across her book. But for the moment she did not look up. She may have judged him to be some casual person pausing to look at the lake and its life, but when his shadow remained there

she raised her head.

"I'm sorry," he said; "I'm afraid I'm disturbing you."

The shadow of him lay across her face as well as across the book. Yes, he still could cast a shadow. And he seemed to see her covered by other shadows and looking up at him with resentment and a kind of alarm.

"Yes — I'm reading. . . ."

Her glance hardened. She lowered her eyes and appeared to resume her reading and Callendar's impression was that of a blind being lowered, shutting him out. His nearness embarrassed her and, feeling towards her as he did, he was hurt by her attempt to repulse him. His natural shyness stood there, busy with its conjectures. Was it that she mistrusted him or did not wish to be bothered by a casual man; or was there something about him that repelled her?

"I'm sorry," he said. "I did not mean. . . ."

She was reading the same line over and over again, without absorbing the sense of it. His voice disturbed her. Like many a lone girl who has had to struggle for life's little decencies, she had grown shy of men, though it might not be the man who had to be feared, but some other woman.

"I have to look after the children."

He seemed to detect in her a quivering, a trembling of the drawn curtain.

"I know. They are rather dear kiddies. I know I'm just a casual ——"

Suddenly she looked up.

"Please — don't sit down here. They are dear children, but they'll come back. If you have — any ——"

She grew inarticulate. She flushed.

"Chivalry," he said. "Is that the word?"

He moved back a step and glanced over his shoulder, but the children were not to be seen.

"Yes."

She seemed to breathe out surprise and relief.

"It's a very old word. Rather obsolete ——"

"Is it?"

He was observing the lowered lashes under the brim of her hat.

"Would you mind telling me, does it offend you — my talking

to you? You see, I'm ——"

She interrupted him with a suggestion of emotional haste.

"No. I feel — you are not the kind of man. But then, perhaps, you noticed — yesterday."

He stood very still.

"Yes. You mean at lunch?"

She nodded.

"It made me — angry."

He saw her look anxiously beyond him for the children.

"Thank you. Perhaps — now — if you think — you will understand. One tries to avoid — humiliation, especially when — one's bread has to be buttered with it. Life can be so beastly."

She was aware of him raising his hat.

"I understand. I'll say good-bye for this morning. But life needn't be like that — not always, I mean. I'll go and find the children."

She gave him an appealing look.

"She's jealous, even of them."

"Good heavens!" said he, and found himself meeting her eyes and finding no fear in them.

"So — you see ——"

He made a movement of the head.

"I'll wander off somewhere, Miss Summerhayes. But — you'll forgive me — if I may have something more to say. I'm rather a lonely man."

He left her and, making for the arched gateway through which he had seen the distant landscape, he found himself leaning upon the stone balustrading of a formal garden. He had been most strangely moved by that fumbling exchange of confidences with Una Summerhayes. He had felt so very inarticulate, such an awkward creature, yet, somehow, he seemed to have stumbled into an intimate relationship with her. It was as though their hands had touched without their meaning them to touch. And he had been conscious of a deep and poignant exultation. She had suffered him to understand the why and wherefore. She had drawn the curtain aside.

His first feeling had been one of compassion, but as he realised her pride, the sensitive self-negations of her dependence upon that yellow-headed little woman, his compassion merged itself into

homage. There was something about her that made him feel towards her as he had never felt to any other woman. Was it her eyes? Or her gentle and expressive voice? Or was it everything about her?

And then he knew.

Good heavens, he was on the edge of loving this woman — he, a doomed man! The great thing had happened just when life was closing, slipping over the final precipice. He had come to look death in the eyes and, instead, he was looking into the eyes of a woman.

He tried to laugh. His hands gripped the outer edge of the stone coping. Madman, sentimental fool! He was letting life trick him, allowing sex to flare up in one last blaze after all these years of dusty tranquillity. He was like an old man putting a match to a pile of useless papers in an office grate.

But was he? He tried to laugh at himself and failed. Was this sudden surge in him an idiotic anticlimax? Might it not be something else, something essentially fine and beautiful, a sort of spiritual sunset before the fall of night, a beautiful experience, a conception and a fulfilment of life and love as it might be? Why grovel and kiss the feet of Death? Had he no manhood left in him? Had he not still the right to look into a woman's eyes and say: "Beloved, I am nothing; and yet — for your sake — I am everything?" Could he not set her free, strike off the sordid shackles, dispel life's fearfulness?

He straightened.

"Why not? I matter to no one. I need not matter very much to her. And yet — I should like a woman to think of me sometimes and to say: 'He loved me — and he made no bargain.' Doomed men should make no bargains."

Callendar felt the warm sun on his face.

"Why not? I came here to find the sun. And isn't the sunlight symbolical?"

VIII

MRS. PYM was going to the opera. They were giving *Otello* and Mrs. Pym had reserved a box. She came down to dinner in a wonderful saffron-coloured frock and stockings of gold and smiled obliquely at Callendar, who was reading the *New York Herald*.

"Ruffi's singing to-night. I've got a box. If you have nothing to

do — come along."

She looked like a woman of forty dressed in a nursery frock. In fact, one gold garter was visible, though the nudity of her shoulders was not of the nursery. Callendar put down his paper and stood up.

"Delighted. It's very kind of you."

He went. *Otello* would have bored him had he been concerned with the music, but he was not. He sat between the two women and made it his business to be gallant to Mrs. Pym; not for his own sake, but for someone else's. For an hour or two he was both the man of the world and the lawyer. And this vain, little creature wriggled her shoulders at him and gave him those oblique, blue smiles and assumed that he was growing interested. She became playful.

"You know — I'm so terribly critical. I always see the skeleton at the feast."

He asked her whether she regarded Desdemona as a skeleton and she tapped his sleeve with her programme.

"Bad man! She's enormous — and fifty — and makes me think of a boarding-house lady shouting for the plumber — after a bad frost."

Callendar laughed. He was wondering how she would behave were he to tell her that she had a skeleton sitting beside her, a living figure of death. He could imagine her giving a little scream and drawing away with a look of fear and disgust. Death is terrifying to such a woman.

He wondered whether it would appear terrifying to Una Summerhayes.

"All this — is so horribly artificial."

"Tin swords and paper roses."

"Yes; I prefer your children. They are charming."

He emphasised the "your" and she gave him a little hard simper.

"They are rather dears."

"I wish you would let me take them out to a show of some kind."

Cleverly he managed to convey to her the impression that he was interested in the children because they were her children. He was not ashamed of his finesse. And she fell for it. Her thin, high-pitched voice expressed an accepted intimacy.

"It's sweet of you. I always find other people's children so boring."

"It so happens — that I don't."

"Nice man. I'll sign your passport form for you. What's it to be?"

"Oh, the Zoo perhaps, and tea at the Russian tea-rooms — perhaps."

"The Zoo is beyond me. But you can ask me to join you at tea."

"Splendid. What about to-morrow — at half-past four?"

"Right you are. You'd better take the governess girl to the Zoo. She's rather a dull creature. She need not come to tea — of course."

"No, of course not," said Callendar; "she would be an odd number."

At ten o'clock next morning Una Summerhayes had her orders. Mrs. Pym was breakfasting in bed, wearing a white lace cap with a blue ribbon threaded through it. Her nose had an added sharpness in the morning."

"Oh, Mr. Callendar is taking the kids to the Zoo this afternoon. You'd better go with them and see they don't make little nuisances of themselves. We are all going to the Russian tea-rooms afterwards. You needn't bother about that."

Miss Summerhayes maintained a consenting face. But, inwardly, she had a moment of indecision. Had he done this purposely and, if so, why? Also he must have handled the matter very delicately and she was pleased and reassured, for a delicate touch is precious to a sensitive plant. And at half-past two she came downstairs with Eileen and Pam and found him waiting in the hall. Her face expressed a kind of gentle austerity, though she allowed him a slight comprehending smile.

"Shall we walk or taxi?"

"Oh, walk."

He observed her for an instant with a protecting carefulness.

"I think we'll drive. These places make you stand a lot."

She was not as strong as her years and gave him a look of thanks.

The Roman Zoo is much like other zoos. It has its stage effects and its rocks and its posed lions, but the two children lost instant hearts to two tiger cubs caged with their mother near the gate. For a quarter of an hour the party got no further than that cage and, so absorbed were Mrs. Pym's children in watching the ways of these two young creatures, that Callendar and the girl were left to talk.

"I hope you'll forgive me for this?"

Her face had softened. It looked smoother, happier.

"I think I can. But I wouldn't — if I thought. . . ."

Her hesitation led him on.

"If I was the sort of man? But I'm not. I've never had much to do with women — save as a lawyer. I have never been married. My life has been nothing — but work. So that when one meets a woman who works ——"

She seemed to be watching the two cubs playing with their mother.

"I work — because I have to."

"Bread and butter ——"

"And often — the butter — is rather rancid. I'm not complaining. But you see. . . ."

Again she hesitated.

"I ought not to talk — like this."

"I want you to. Shall I tell you what first struck me about you?"

Her lashes flickered.

"Aren't we being rather personal? Besides ——"

"What else should you and I be? It seemed to me that you lived in fear of something."

For a moment she seemed to stiffen and he wondered whether his touch had been too intimate.

"I do. Aren't we all like that?"

He remembered his narrowing future and felt a spasm of conscious yearning.

"Oh, yes. But you?"

"I? I have had to scratch a living for myself for the last ten years. A girl who works and has no capital and no friends — has some pretty bad moments. Cheap lodgings and your last pound note. And the fear of losing your job and being stranded."

"Have you been stranded?"

"Twice. So people have got you rather badly, like your mother. Oh, but I'm not being fair. It's the idea of being sent adrift — in a strange country, perhaps without the money to take you home."

"It ought not to be," he said. "Believe me — I understand."

It seemed to him that she shrank into herself for a moment. She had that tragic sensitiveness that is for ever drawing a curtain and feeling shocked with itself. She had been blurting out confidences to a comparative stranger, showing herself perhaps as a poor, plaintive, beggarly thing.

She flushed.

"But — I'm getting harder. Don't you think we ought to be moving on?"

He stood his ground. He pretended to be watching the children, who had christened the two tiger cubs "Pip" and "Squeak." He did not like the idea of her getting harder. Those brown eyes were not meant to be hard. Also, he had become suddenly and acutely conscious of his own fate. He began to suffer, for he was becoming so very conscious of her as a woman, a pleasant and gracious creature, a live and comely thing.

"They are quite happy. Don't hurry me. I was going to tell you——"

But he was not allowed to tell her just then, for Eileen and Pam came and collected them, the tiger cubs having insisted on going to sleep.

"Let's see the lions."

"Yes, to the lions," said Callendar, echoing that cry of old Imperial Rome.

To tell her or not to tell her? He shirked the issue and as the days passed the decision became more difficult. For insensibly they found themselves lovers, though it was love unconfessed — shy, diffident, an affair of glances and of little meetings on the stairs or in the lounge or under the trees of the Borghese. How else could it happen, with that little yellow-headed shrew of a woman, thinly licentious, picking at life with jealous fingers. Yet Callendar realised that Una Summerhayes did not avoid him. Her eyes lifted to meet his. They were such very honest eyes.

He found himself looking in his mirror at the face of a man of seven and forty who had cancer of the throat. His face might be a little thinner, but it was still a youngish face. The skin had not lost its colour or its fine texture. He had some grey in his hair.

"How astonishing," he thought, "and how tragic!"

A lover with death on his shoulders, the heart of youth in the body of dissolution! And he wanted to remain the lover for a day or a week or a month, to enjoy the exquisite stealth of it, to watch that other love awakening in a woman's eyes.

But was it fair?

True, he was going to strike the shackles from her and put her

beyond the power of such women as Mrs. Pym; but would not the Una Summerhayes of his second youth ask for something more than an alteration in his will? A good woman who loves is the least mercenary of creatures. His loving her was a beautiful reality. Death was a reality. And if she cared — was not her caring a reality to be tenderly reverenced?

He came to realise that he would have to tell her and to tell her soon and that an attitude of sentimental fatherliness was false. He was her lover. He loved her with the head of forty-seven and the heart of five and twenty.

Standing beside the fountain of the nymph with the pitcher in the Pincian gardens, he began to prepare the stage. The Pym children had found other children to play with and were running races round the bandstand.

"Don't you ever get a day to yourself?"

Her eyes had a liquid look.

"Oh, once a month."

"When does it happen?"

"It could happen next Thursday."

He touched her shoulder with shy gentleness.

"I am hiring a car. I am going to Hadrian's villa and Tivoli. Will you come?"

"On Thursday?"

"Yes, on Thursday. It is very serious to me, Una. I want you to come."

She was silent for a moment, but it was not the silence of hesitation.

"Ought I to tell Mrs. Pym?"

"Mrs. Pym does not matter. Tell her anything or nothing. You need not think of the woman."

"What right has she to be told?"

"None."

IX

IT WAS a day of live, warm sunlight. They drove across the Campagna, with Tivoli and the little hill towns rising into white distinctness. They had their lunch with them, a bottle of red wine, two glasses, and coffee in a thermos. When they left the car at the

entrance to the villa, the hedges of box were sending out their fragrance and the cypresses pointed to an exquisite blueness.

The padrone of the little restaurant looked disapprovingly at Callendar's luncheon-basket. A grizzled, old guide, kindly denied even the privilege of carrying the basket, was given a ten-lire note to save the human touch.

They passed up and along the cypresses and box.

"How peaceful!"

Her face dreamed and Callendar observed her as a man might gaze at his beloved in heaven.

"It's a wonderful spot. Have you been here before?"

"Never."

They paused by the ruins of the little theatre.

"It is Nature that matters here," he said. "I should imagine that it was a pompous, garish place in Hadrian's day. But the trees have come into their own. When the trees grow as they please, vulgarity goes."

She smiled round at him.

"Imagine Leicester Square in ruins and oaks and beeches growing out of the ruins!"

"Exactly!" he said. "Everything comes back to beauty."

They wandered up and on and under the ilex shade, with the Vale of Tempe a hollow full of sunlight. And Callendar felt an inward trembling. The day was so alive — and so was she — and he had brought her here to tell her that he was a dying man. Oh, bitterness and exquisite pain! How would she take it? What would she say? And when he told her that never again need she be humiliated by the world's Mrs. Pyms, would she accept his last homage? He had no thought of asking her for anything. He wanted to see her happy, secure, unexposed to vulgar things. He would impose upon her no conditions.

She noticed his silence, but it seemed part of the day's blessedness. She had no other woman to fear. She was free, herself, a happy and unselfconscious creature — for this one day at least.

"Mayn't I have my turn with the basket?"

"No," he said; "man likes to carry things while he can."

"Protected womanhood!"

"Do you resent it?"

She shook her head.

"Does any woman like to be — independent — really? We have to make the best of things — and pretend."

"There's such a thing as freedom," he said. "I don't believe wholly in the male hand. After all — everything is relative. And men like giving."

"So do we."

"And a woman gives — when she really gives. A checque-book is a poor reply, but it is something."

They idled about amid massive ruins. Here were old red walls and chambers and naked arches and fragments of pavement. What each ruin had been mattered nothing. What mattered was the sky and the sun and the stately stone pines and the clouding blackness of the ilexes and each other. Callendar still carried the basket and her eyes grew playful and tender.

"Since you won't let me help with the basket, hadn't we better have lunch and empty it."

"I'm ready."

"Let's choose a place. Not — any place, though all of this is lovely."

The sun was so strong that they chose the thin shade of an old olive tree and, spreading their raincoats on the grass, knelt down to open the basket. Callendar had had a special lunch put up. The red wine was old, but not too old

"Hungry?"

"I am."

"You — unpack."

"Shall I?"

He watched her and between them they spread a cloth; and, as he watched her hands, he thought: "They are young hands. I'll tell her after lunch. I wonder if she'll shrink from me? Disease — is so repulsive. I should like to have kissed her — once — without her knowing that I'm rotten fruit. But it wouldn't have been fair. And perhaps — after all — she doesn't care and I am fancying things. I must be nearly twenty years older than she is."

They lunched. The red wine had the warmth of the sun in it and, after the second glass, he began to tell her things about himself and his life, as though she had a right to know them. He was leading up to the stark reality. She was a good listener, perhaps because no

other man had interested her as he did. The appeal was not wholly emotional. She could see him sitting in his office chair, what the world called a dull man, doing the same things from day to day and doing them with patient efficiency. He had had sisters to help and a young brother to educate. Yes, work had been his inspiration, until — as he confessed — he had discovered that his work was at an end.

She was surprised. He happened to appear younger to her than he was.

"You have retired?"

He leant over and refilled her glass.

"Life has retired me. I came out here for the first long holiday I have ever had. It had a most strange effect upon me, Una. I realized — oh, well, something had been asleep in me all these years; I had missed things. But in Rome — I woke up."

She touched the glass with her lips.

"Here's to your awakening."

He smiled.

"That's to — you."

Her lashes remained a-droop. She was very still.

"To — me?"

"You drink — to yourself. But let me tell you everything. Try and be forbearing ——"

She gave him a questioning glance.

"Forbearing? To you ——?"

"Wait, my dear. I want to tell you quickly. I came out here — a doomed man. I came just to sit in the sun for a month or two. And then — you happened. Just think, how beautiful and ironical and strange to find the woman — the beloved — just when you are face to face with death."

She was gazing at him. He saw the glass tilt and some of the red wine spill over upon her dress. She had a strange, poignant, incredulous look. Her eyes seemed to grow larger.

"To die? You?"

He nodded.

"They told me in London that I had only a few months to live. It's true. Though, sitting here with you in the sunlight — I can hardly believe it ——"

He saw her lips move.

"No, let me go right through with it, dear. It's both so sweet and so bitter. If you could have cared a little — I should have asked. But how could I? It wasn't fair. You — with your youth — and I — a dying man. And yet — the great thing has been mine. You — appeared to me — just before dusk. But there will be no more Mrs. Pym."

He did not look at her; he felt that he dared not look, while she, shocked, almost incredulous and a little frightened, sat mute for a moment. What a bewildering, tragic climax! For she had allowed herself to dream during the early days of this Roman spring and — now — there was death in her dream. But with the first heart-pang came compassion, a reaching out of the hand.

"Oh, my dear friend, is it true?"

He grasped her hand and held it for a moment.

"It is true. And here — in the sunlight — I had to tell you. How strange! Perhaps — if it had been otherwise — you could have cared a little."

She answered him instantly and with a flash of feeling.

"I do care."

"My dear!"

"Why should you be surprised? But tell me, is it so certain? You look. . . . What is it?"

He touched his throat.

"There. Haven't you noticed my voice? It may be quite easy for me. I may not have much pain. I shall just shrivel up ——"

"Oh, don't," she said and her mouth and eyes were tremulous. "It's too — too tragic. You — of all men."

His face seemed to catch the sunlight.

"Well, there is it. Forgive me — for being a man. You — just happened. But there is one thing death cannot do. It cannot cheat me of asking you to take a part of me that would have been yours and is yours."

"You don't mean ——?"

"I mean, Una, that there shall be no more Mrs. Pym, no more strandings. Oh, my dear, you'll let me do this? There is so little that I can do. I don't ask for anything."

"You mean ——?"

"Oh, money, dirt — but blessed dirt. I want to go out — seeing

you, yourself, free, secure, unhindered. I want to leave you five hundred a year. You are robbing no one. My sisters and my brother will each have something, though they need nothing — now. I'm not a facile fool, my dearest. It's just my wish, a sacred sort of wish. Will you quarrel with it? I ask you not to quarrel with it."

"And you ask — for nothing?"

"Nothing. Only — that you'll try not to feel any shrinking. I shall just go back to England, to finish things. You need not ever see me — when — I'm getting beyond being seen."

He saw her put down her wine-glass and she did it with a steady hand. She had been holding it all this time. Her face perplexed him. Her young, dark dignity seemed to be taking counsel with itself. Almost, her eyes looked hard. And he wondered and felt a little afraid and, when she got up slowly and stood and gazed, he remained very still, fearing her youth and its fastidiousness. She gave him the impression of being utterly alone with herself for the moment. And suddenly she turned and walked slowly towards a group of cypresses that cut the blue distance of the Campagna.

He watched her with miserable eyes.

"Yes, she shrinks," he thought. "I must have the smell of death about me. It's natural."

And, with the submissive courage of the plain man, he reached for the thermos and poured himself out a cup of coffee.

X

HE WAS replacing the cup of the thermos when he received the impression that she had spoken to him. He glanced towards the group of cypresses. She was leaning against one of the trees, looking at him with peculiar intentness, her eyes like two little circles of shadows. And as he looked at her, he seemed to know that his impression had been both fanciful and real; that she had uttered no sound and yet that her inward self had called to him.

He said: "You have forgotten your coffee."

She did not reply. Her eyes continued to look at him with that compelling, dark intentness, and he aware of his whole consciousness becoming centred upon her motionless, young figure. It was as though he saw her as an allegory, a live soul evolved and evolving

out of the world's past, a creature more gracious and sensitive and mysterious than any of the pagan women who had known an emperor's embraces. He still had the illusion of life in him and yet she was no illusion. Her consciousness called to his.

He rose and went towards her across the grass. He was aware of her leaning against the trunk of the tree like some young priestess in an ecstasy leaning against the pillar of a temple. Her face was upturned. He saw the white of her throat. Her eyes looked straight into his. They never wavered. They gave him a feeling of infinite understanding. They seemed to have the comprehending and tranquillizing softness of a southern sky at night.

Neither of them uttered a word. When he was quite near to her she met him with a little upward movement of the chin, naïve and tender and confiding.

"Kiss me," it said; "I am not afraid of the death in you — if death it is."

Very gently he touched her lips with his. He felt the warmth and the youth and the freshness of them. It seemed to him like death touching a flower.

"My dear," he said, and stood speechless holding her hands.

XI

IN THE days of old Rome, men drove hard bargains but the argument between these two was less utilitarian.

She said: "I don't take everything and give nothing. I'm not that sort of woman. I don't want to be that sort of woman."

They had wandered away to a kind of a high cliff of a ruin where the old red brickwork raised a platform above the valley. They sat on the grass in the sun. No one disturbed them, not even the crowd of black-frocked students who drifted about like crows seeking historical carrion. Her love was wide-eyed and brave, almost a young widow's love and, in listening to her voice, he seemed to hear life and death in argument.

"If you wish me to accept that money, dear, you must marry me."

But here he spoke of other terms; not for his own sake, but for hers.

"Why — marriage? I don't expect. Does one go into partnership

with a ghost? For that's what I am — a ghost."

She would not have it.

"No, a spirit, the very soul of a man, dear one. I ask marriage, not as a kind of insurance. I've no business instincts towards you."

He smiled at her.

"No; I don't think you have. But — if I marry you — I shan't expect ——"

She touched his hand.

"What's in your mind — exactly? Are you humouring a child? Because — I'm not a child, you know."

"Just this: I'm not buying your love, or the kindness of a woman who consents to nurse a wreck — till the wreckage goes to pieces. Let us have our month together and then I'll go away and get through the last chapter. I don't want you to have to read it."

She looked at him wide-eyed.

"You mean — I should have — what you call the pleasant part — and be spared — if you think of it as being spared?"

"Exactly. I want to keep the beauty. Is it vanity, or something better? I shall wither up in some nursing home among people who are politely kind and mercifully indifferent. One can pay to die in decent privacy and get the ugliness — put away."

But this sentimental cynicism failed to deceive her. He was neither a sentimentalist nor a cynic, nor was she a middle-class opportunist, but a girl who knew the shabby side of life and the number of stitches you had to give for a shilling. She might be a little governess at the mercy of a dozen vulgar mischances, but she would give value for value. She would carry through her part of the job. And she put it to him bluntly, with a kind of pragmatical tenderness. If his little governess was to be granted a pension — well — she would earn it — to the limits of her capacity.

"I'm not that sort of woman. I'm not afraid of what you call — the ugliness. Besides — I won't allow that it need be ugly."

"But — think ——"

She put out a hand.

"Hold it. If what we call loving — is worth anything — doesn't it — make things possible? If I had to die, would you want to run away and leave me to die alone with your politely kind and merci-

fully indifferent people? I know better. And so do you."

He could not move her from her decision and it is probable that in his heart of hearts he was infinitely glad of her decision and grateful to her for it. He had found no shrinking in her and he was both touched and astonished. She had not avoided his lips, but had sought them. For a few kisses she might have won five hundred a year, with no unpleasant restrictions attached to the contract, but she had elected to choose otherwise.

"You are thorough," he said to her.

"Oh, my dear, don't you realize? I care. And for the little while — we shall have. . . . Oh, somehow, I can't believe it. Are you sure?"

"The doctors were very sure."

"But surely — something — can be done?"

"Not in my case. Besides — six weeks ago I accepted the alternative — and in six weeks — such a thing spreads. It's final."

She sat holding his hand.

"I wish you would see someone in Rome."

"I will — if you wish it."

"I do. It seems so cruel and ironical."

He pointed to a mass of broken brickwork.

"So it was in their day. Death sits in the sun beside every man and woman. But life goes on."

She made a little shivering movement and drew closer to him.

"Let's feel the sun — while we have it. Oh, if only one could will things."

"So we can, certain things. We can will beauty and good memories and courage. Let's will them together, Una, while we can."

XII

AT THE end of the day Mrs. Pym intervened.

They had forgotten the very existence of that bright, little woman and forgotten it so thoroughly that they drove up to the Eliseo without fear or favour. Callendar handed out his betrothed and, at this very moment of homage, Mrs. Pym happened upon them. Miss Summerhayes's official holiday closed at five o'clock and the hour was half-past five.

Callendar was paying the chauffeur and Una was intercepted in

the vestibule. The catechizing, vicious and abrupt, developed in the presence of the two page-boys.

"Where have you been?"

"To Hadrian's villa and Tivoli."

"With Mr. Callendar?"

"Yes, with Mr. Callendar."

Mrs. Pym glistened.

"An affair — I suppose. I don't encourage affairs. They are rather superfluous — in a governess."

Callendar caught those last words. He came into the vestibule with a kind of dry and serene smile; he was both the lawyer and the lover.

"I think I ought to explain. Miss Summerhayes and I are engaged to be married. Yes, in Rome, at the earliest opportunity. So, obviously — in the absence of any proper agreement — Miss Summerhayes's responsibilities lapse."

Mrs. Pym behaved like a vulgar woman.

"Oh, indeed! But I engaged Miss Summerhayes for six months, on trial. She has been with me just four. I shall insist ——"

Callendar had had to deal, professionally, with many such women, but more impartially so; and, to him, Mrs. Pym was just a gadfly. He turned to the girl. No longer need she be stung by these humiliations.

"I don't think we need argue the matter. Though, for the sake of the children ——?"

"I am quite ready to stay on for a week with Eileen and Pam, until Mrs. Pym has had time ——"

But Mrs. Pym rushed in the opposite direction, as Callendar had expected that she would. He had piqued her into the inevitable contradiction.

"No favours — thank you. I can look after my own children. But Miss Summerhayes will be responsible for her week's bill."

Callendar made a movement in the direction of the lounge. He drew Una Summerhayes with him. He left a silence behind him as the most efficient of gags. He went down the steps into the lounge, holding the glass door open for his betrothed and drawing about her the cloak of their dear and intimate aloofness.

"Supposing we go and make a few arrangements? Or are you

tired?"

No, she was not tired. But would he not like to rest? He let the glass door swing back upon the little, yellow-headed figure in the hall.

"That's finished. We'll go and look up rooms elsewhere, though I shall always feel kindly towards this little place. Adieu to Mrs. Pym."

She gave him a deep, full glance.

"Perhaps I had better pack. And would you settle my bill for me. I have some money."

She opened her bag and offered him her purse. He took it. He knew that she wished him to take it.

"I'll see to that. And my own. But — afterwards — it will be my affair, please. You will allow me that?"

She answered with a little, silent movement of the head.

XIII

CALLENDAR bought her betrothal ring in a shop an the Piazza de Spagna. They had descended the Spanish Steps from their new hotel in the Via Sistina, where Una Summerhayes had a room on the second floor and Callendar one on the third. The ring he bought her was a very fine emerald set in an old Italian silver setting. She had tried on at least a dozen rings, but this was hers; the shape of it seemed to suit the sensitive slimness of her hand.

"Yes, that's yours," he said. "There is something fine and fastidious — about that ring."

She smiled up at him and the shopman smiled at both of them. That ring was going to cost Callendar five thousand lire.

"A week ago I couldn't afford to be fastidious."

"Oh, yes, you could."

"No; I had to ration my visits to the hairdresser. But five thousand lire, dear man?"

He was looking with a queer dreaminess at the ring on her finger. Would she have to pay death duty on that stone? And what a thing to think of!

They left the shop and, crossing the crowded piazza, paused by the flower-stalls at the bottom of the Spanish Steps. Here were

roses and carnations, violets and anemones, narcissi and tulips.

"Which will you have?"

"Oh, violets."

He bought her violets and they went up the steps and each of them glanced instinctively at the window of the room in which John Keats died.

"I am luckier than poor Keats," thought Callendar.

And she, with a little spasm of heart pain, pressed the violets he had given her to her lips.

Under the ilexes of the Villa Medici he asked her a question.

"Shall it be before or afterwards?"

She understood his meaning. They were standing by the big stone basin of the fountain and in the shadow of the trees and she moved out into the sunlight and sat down on the low wall of the terrace. Rome was all sunset and noise, a pit in which beasts howled and bleated. The dome of St. Peter's floated like a grey-blue bubble and, defying it, the Victor Emmanuel monument — flashed its white false teeth. But with the Janiculum a stage over which the sun poured its eloquence upon the narrow streets and the domes and the old brown roofs, she felt Rome as Rome, a city of symbolism, even though its modern note was the shout of the motor-car.

"Our marriage — first, unless. . . ."

She seemed to hesitate. Her decision fluttered like a hand over a case of rings, sacramental rings.

"They said at the Consulate?"

"We should have to wait some days."

She turned to look up at him.

"Our marriage first. And yet ——"

He was thinking how she had changed in the course of a week. She looked so much more alive, so much more like a flower that had needed sunlight. Her aliveness tantalized him and yet he divined in it an exquisite mystery. It was of the spirit and not of the flesh.

"And yet ——?"

Smiling down at her, he echoed the words.

"What — exactly — is in your dear head?"

"It's in my heart — I think. I would like to feel that I was giving myself to you, as I gave myself on that wonderful day, be-

lieving——"

"I think I understand," he said.

XIV

THEY were married on the morning of a soft spring day. It was a social gesture — nothing more — an individual occasion. They walked out into the Piazza di Spagna and went to lunch in the little Italian restaurant in the Via Bocca Leone, where to be cosmopolitan was to be Roman. There were flowers on the table. Giuseppe, son of the house, served them as though it was he who conferred the favour, for Giuseppe was a notable black-shirt and young Italy is a little arrogant.

They smiled together over Giuseppe's condescension.

"These — Imperialists! Well, do you feel very different?"

She both felt and was different, for to a woman marriage is always more of a mystery than it is to a man. Also, this sacramental day was to have a double crisis, marriage in the morning, judgment in the afternoon. Quaint people! It was she who had proposed that he should arrange with Dr. Tellford for a consultation with an Italian specialist and their appointment was for three o'clock at Dr. Tellford's flat. She had a wild, impulsive hope which she strove to chasten. Death seemed so incredible on such a day and as she sat at the table and drank her wine she stole little secret and fearful glances at this dear comrade. His face had a certain thin fragility and the skin a faint pallor, but he did not look ill. Not as a doomed man might be expected to look. His voice had not changed; it still had that slight huskiness. And she tried to believe that his illness was a dreadful illusion and that, somehow, it would be dispelled and vanish like an unhappy dream.

Afterwards they went and sat in the Pincian gardens and watched the children playing. They sat in the sun. They had an hour to kill before the appointment at the English doctor's flat. And Rome seemed so alive, with its thronging girls and mothers and its children chasing each other under the trees. People basked and gossiped. These strong, buxom, southern women, who looked so much more solid than their children, displayed their black hair burnished by the sunlight.

Callendar, watching his wife as her glances followed some particular child, wondered how deeply the urge towards motherhood penetrated the modern woman. He had been accustomed to think of himself as a conventional old fellow, a sentimental bachelor, a baby and rosebuds sort of idiot. He supposed that he had the usual illusions about children, because he had had nothing to do with them. But Una had lived with and known the child.

"Rather charming — these Roman kiddies."

It seemed to him that her eyes were big and suffused with some inward tenderness.

"Here is another sort of imperialism. Baby is King and Emperor — in Italy."

"You think so?"

"Well, look. What are nearly all these women here for? Either with children, or to look at children."

He smiled to himself and at her.

"Yes, I suppose so. But what strikes me about these Roman children is their soft voices. So different from the northern children."

She agreed and he asked her to explain it and she sat beside him with an air of mystery and of sadness.

"Perhaps — because children are wanted here. All children are little egotists, you know; and many of them are little savages."

"Barbarians? And Rome — the mother — civilizes the little savage. Is that it?"

She nodded.

"I think so. Every woman — who has the mother in her — is like Rome. I think you have to love a child very much and wisely."

Leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees, he looked at the two rings she was wearing.

"Some women — want children? Is it true?"

"It might be very true," she said, and saw that he was feeling for his watch.

Climbing together the stone stairway leading to Dr. Tellford's flat, they held hands and pretended to a calmness that was wholly on the surface. Dr. Tellford and a very insignificant-looking man were waiting for them, but the little Italian ceased to appear insignificant when he took Callendar in hand. Tellford, tall and austere, suggested that Mrs. Callendar should wait in the salon.

She glanced at Callendar and he nodded.

"Better, dear. I don't suppose we shall be long."

She managed to smile at him and went out with a memory of her husband sitting in a chair and of the Italian with a shining bulb of light upon his forehead busy with little mirrors. She stood at one of the windows of Dr. Tellford's room and looked down into the narrow Roman street, but without being aware of it as a street. She seemed to be counting her own heart beats. How would these moments of suspense end? Would it be death or life.

She heard the door open long before she had expected it to open. Callendar had come into the room; he closed the door. A moment ago he had been speaking to Dr. Tellford: "Yes, I thought so. If you don't mind, I'll go and tell my wife." Yet his face told her nothing, save that he loved her very dearly. He was very calm.

"They have given me a little longer, Una — that's all."

She ran to him and hid her face.

"Oh, my dear, my darling."

He held her fast.

"There, there. They think it is not going to be so very hard for me. Slow, but sure. No — nothing to be done."

He kissed her wet face.

"I'm making you suffer. It's wrong. I want you to be happy. Let's go back into the sunlight and watch the children playing."

XV

CALLENDAR lived another eleven months, long enough to see the child — a boy — that Una bore him. They had taken and furnished a little house in Berkshire in the pine-and-heather country south of Reading and not far from the ruins of Silchester, that relic of old Rome.

Even towards the end it was difficult for those who saw him to realize that Callendar was a dying man. He was very thin and his voice was little more than a whisper, but he managed to keep on his feet, as though the spirit that was in him compelled his body to serve him to the last. Moreover, his face did not express suffering; it was strangely serene and gentle, a lover's face to the very end. The woman whom he loved had borne him a child. He had given a

child to a woman who had asked for his child. That is the only survival that a man can be sure of.

It is probable that the last year of his life was the happiest that he had known. Happiness is relative and those last months were full of deep self-expression. One can do no more than love and insure one's love against calculable mischances. The incalculable is still with us, because we are still but children playing on the edge of the great deeps.

Callendar passed over on a February afternoon. He seemed to fall into a little fluttering sleep and he never emerged from it. His wife sitting beside him, suddenly realized that he had ceased breathing and, with a look at his still, calm face, fell — as by instinct — upon her knees.

"Oh, my dear!"

He had gone from her, her good comrade of a year; and yet, as she let her tears come and pressed that thin, right hand, she knew that both of them had had cause for pride. It had been a marriage without a shadow, perhaps because it had been lived under the edge of that great, impending shadow. Nothing but good memories remained behind.

She looked at Callendar as he lay there with the February sunlight shining in upon his face. She did not draw down the blind. Why should one draw down blinds? He had loved the sunlight.

Her eyes were poignant.

"Beloved, how much you have given me. All that you could give. This was our sacred year."

She bent and kissed his forehead. She went and fetched her son and, carrying him into the room where the father lay dead, she knelt down and placed the child upon the bed. She looked from the dead man to that little piece of ruddy flesh and back again to the dead face.

"Death and Life," she thought. "But is there such a thing as death? Oh, my dear, I feel that you will still be looking down on me from the windows of some other and greater Rome."

Sennen Climbs a Wall

SENNEN GOT INTO THE THIRD-CLASS COMPARTMENT RATHER LIKE A sick animal creeping into a hutch.

"Wish I were dead."

Which was a coward's wish, and he knew it, though a man cannot always be at the top of his courage, and especially a man of Sennen's age and build and temperament. He was dark and slight and sallow, and tinged with white at the temples, a serious and rather gentle soul, prematurely aged.

What a day it had been! Eighty in the shade and both windows of the compartment had been left up. He lowered the window nearest to him and hoped that he would be left to himself, which was not likely. He was going home as he had gone home hundreds of times in the same sort of way, and yet how differently!

Had he taken that fruit to his wife in the nursing-home and had he heard aright the words they had spoken to him?

"It is very serious. . . . Yes; a complication, quite unexpected. I'm afraid there is not much hope. . . . No; you must not see her. Come to-morrow."

As if that had not been sufficient! It had been sufficient to deal Sennen a blow over the heart, and when that other blow had been dealt him he had felt a kind of dull pain, a vague wonder. He had been called into young Sackville's office. Of course, everybody knew that Prout & Sackville were amalgamating with another firm, but everybody had hoped that they would be the fortunate indispensables.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sennen, but owing to the new arrangement certain members of our staff will become superfluous."

Superfluous! What a word, and to a man of three-and-forty who had gone through the War and had married a French girl, and had craved for nothing but peace.

Dully, Sennen had asked bland young Sackville a question.

"When will it be, sir?"

"At the end of the month."

"It's rather hard. You see — my wife's dangerously ill. I suppose you couldn't ——?"

"I'm sorry. It's not easy to have to do these things. Business is rather beastly — sometimes — Sennen."

And Sennen had said: "Yes, when a man's past forty."

He was going home to that little post-war house at Walsham where he and Marie had made such a happy business of being at home. He had nowhere else to go. He could not walk up and down the London streets all night, waiting for the morning and a few words with his dying wife. How hot it was! Usually on such a day as this he would have rushed home and got out the piece of garden-hose secreted in the toolshed and, having attached it to the scullery tap, flourished a plume of refreshing water over the grass and the beds of their potty but cherished garden. Their water-rate did not allow for the use of a hose, but that was part of the excitement. And Marie's lettuces and tomatoes! She was such a great little woman for salads. Was this reality — the fact that she would make no more salads?

The carriage filled up. A fat man sat on Sennen's pocket and puffed at a foul and bubbling pipe and kept turning an evening paper, but Sennen was not conscious of his fellow-humans. A curious feeling of apartness possessed him. These other people were shadows: he and his tragedy were the sole realities. He sat and stared out of the window, yet the passing country was a mere sunlit blur. He did not recognize the familiar landmarks. Crushed into his corner, he became less and less the little City man and more and more Sennen the Cornishman. He was both awake and asleep.

The train stopped at Walsham, and Sennen was staring at nothing with wide, brown eyes. The train went on. The fat man got up to get out at Ladybridge; he slammed the door; the train rolled on. Sennen, as though relieved of a sense of pressure, came to life for a moment and glanced about him questioningly.

"What station was that?"

A young fellow opposite looked over the top of his paper.

"Ladybridge."

"We've passed Walsham?"

"Yes; twenty minutes ago."

Sennen gave a kind of faint, pallid smile and sat back in his corner. The young fellow supposed that he might be feeling the heat.

"Doesn't matter."

"Firford next station. You can get a train back."

"Yes — get a train back."

Sennen got out at Firford. He wandered rather aimlessly along the platform to the exit. He spoke to the ticket collector.

"Passed my station — Walsham. When's the next train back?"

"Half an hour."

"I think I'll go out and look round."

The ticket collector let him pass.

Sennen had never been to Firford. It had remained a mere village, untouched by the splurge of new houses, for it was a little too far from town to suit either the pockets or the time-tables of the black-coated brotherhood. But, to Sennen, Firford as Firford was less than nothing. He passed through it, but he did not see it. His legs took him through the village as though they had been wound up and would go on walking until the person who was Stephen Sennen decided that they should stop. He was conscious of a most strange feeling of unreality; life had no object and objects no solidity. The country beyond the village — with its pinewoods and its gorse and heather — was like a dim tapestry, faded and thin. He walked. He seemed to lose all sense of time and space; he was a mere dull, confused pain drifting upon a pair of legs; there was a part of him that was vaguely aware of a railway station and of a train to be caught, and of a place called Walsham; but these realities were like trivial memories left over from some other world.

He took a lane that diverged into the pinewoods. He did not will himself to go that way. Possibly the evening gloom of the trees and the blue shadows under them attracted him, offering a sense of coolness, of a peace. The dark wood was like a cool hand laid upon the hot forehead of the dying day. He met no one. A great silence and solitude encompassed him. The last rays of the sun lingered upon the red throats and the green tops of the trees. Twilight was at hand. He realized it merely as a gentle darkness spreading among the tree trunks.

But this world seemed real, most strangely real, while London and

the Southern Railway and houses became less than shadows. He wandered on. The lane branched and, taking the left-hand fork, he came quite suddenly upon a different greenness, the greenness of old beech trees shutting in a park. A grey stone wall stretched right and left under the branches of the trees. It seemed to have no end and no beginning; it was like the grey body of some monstrous and mystical snake encircling the earth.

Sennen stood and stared at the wall. His impulse was to climb it, though he could not explain the impulse and did not try to explain it. He seemed to be obeying an instinct. He approached the wall, got his hands on the top of it and his toes in the crevices, and hauled himself up. A branch brushed his face. He straddled the wall for a few seconds, and then let himself down into the green gloom under the trees. He had a feeling as of being in another world, a strange, secret world. He had left that other hustling world behind.

Something drew him on. He passed through the belt of beeches into a little park where old trees stood like dark green obelisks and pyramids. He saw a yellow sky and what seemed to him to be another mass of trees and the twisted chimneys of an old house. There was a gleam of water under the afterglow. Everything was very secret and still.

Normally, Sennen would have thought: "I'm trespassing; I've no right here. I ought to get out of this." But the Sennen of this August twilight had a feeling of rightness. Besides, what did it matter what happened to him in some other man's park. Nothing mattered; he was vaguely forty and about to be unemployed, and Marie was dying. Also, all this English greenness and the twilight were so very gentle that he accepted them as though they had been prepared for him. It felt cool here, with a strange, refreshing coolness, and he walked on to explore, heading towards those banks of foliage that seemed to enclose a garden.

Suddenly he stood and gazed at a wicket gate in an oak fence. He seemed to have seen that gate before, and the path that disappeared between the massive yews and hollies. A queer idea came into his head.

"That gate was meant."

He took off his hat and passed a hand across his forehead. What did the words mean? Was he a little touched in the head? But he

knew — somehow — that he was going to pass through that gate, though he did not know what was behind those walls of foliage.

He went through the gate and along the grass path between the yews and the hollies. The sky was a deep, dark blue above his head. A star blinked. The stillness was extraordinary. Not a leaf moved. His own footsteps seemed soundless, as though he was gliding over dark water in a world that knew no wind. The path ended suddenly and opened into another path or walk that stretched to the west in one broad sweep, its dark green turf seeming to meet the pale primrose of the western sky.

Sennen stood still. For a moment he felt like a startled child who, trespassing in a garden, comes suddenly upon an unexpected figure, some grotesque shape, a tree in a dark wood that mimics a brown bear or a man with a club. This broad walk or terraceway was lined by strange shapes and, outlined against the fading sky, they stood black and mysterious and huge. There were castles and crowns and the heads of strange beasts, human figures that held banners or spears. And then he realized that all these shapes were trees, yews clipped into scores of fantastic emblems.

Almost, as he went slowly over the grass, he expected some of these creatures to move, and once he did fancy that the jaws of a strange beast opened. He paused to stare at the grotesque head. The sky was growing dark, but the twilight lingered. And then he heard a clock striking with a note like a bell. He counted the strokes — one to twelve.

Midnight? But how absurd! He pulled out his own watch, and in the dim light the hands stood at nine. He wandered on. This wall of the yews seemed endless, and suddenly he was startled and more than startled. There was the clang as of a sword striking metal, and from a great yew clipped like a sentry-box a white figure emerged, a shape in shining armour, sword raised.

Sennen recoiled, but the figure remained motionless outside the dark niche cut in the tree, and Sennen tried to laugh.

"Hallo, old chap——"

He took two steps towards the knight in armour and suddenly the sword fell and struck the shield, and with the same clanging sound the figure drew back into its recess. Sennen stood and stared. His skin felt cold. He assured himself that he had been scared by

some ridiculous, mechanical toy, some rich man's whimsical jest.

But was it just that? Had he invaded the garden of some wealthy and eccentric soul? Why was he afraid? Why did his skin tingle and creep? And this most strange feeling of reality in the midst of unreality?

He avoided that recess in the clipped yew. He took the other side of the grass walk. He had gone about ten yards when a plume of water shot up from the snout of a dolphin. A fountain. He seemed to see the dim glitter of it; but when he went near and held out a hand towards the grey moisture his hand remained dry.

Again he was more than startled. He touched his mouth with his fingers. Yes — they were dry; and when he stood in the midst of that visible spray — it had no moisture.

"What's the matter with me?"

But that question was like the place itself: a mouth that was silent, a suggestion of eyes that saw and remained invisible. His sense of wonder increased. That creepy feeling left him. He became aware of a sense of profound and expectant curiosity. He seemed to see the end of this gallery of strange shapes; and, walking on, he came to a low, stone wall with a seat set against it. On the other side of the wall there was a drop of fifteen feet, and Sennen saw the sheen of water, the still, dark surface of a pool. He leant against the wall. He felt himself trembling with expectancy. What would he see and hear? Something? Yes, he seemed to know that in this most strange place other things would happen. But not with terror or malignity. He divined a gentleness, a beautiful melancholy.

What was that? A violin? Yes, somewhere a violin was being played; but the music was unfamiliar, like nothing that he had heard before. It made him think of that fountain that was not water. It suggested string music without strings.

He sat down on the seat. The music ceased. He was aware of a gradual radiance spreading behind him, the light of a rising moon. The rays struck along the broad, grass walk with the strange shapes guarding it on either side.

Something moved in the moonlight, and Sennen rose from the stone seat. A figure approached between the clipped yews, and Sennen saw it as the figure of a little old man. It came briskly towards the seat, as though it knew that someone was waiting there.

"Now," thought Sennen, "apologies — or something stranger than that."

The old man's clothes were of other times. He wore a big, beaver hat, black knee-breeches and white stockings, and a tail-coat with brass buttons. His shoes had buckles. He raised his hat and gave Sennen a little bow.

"Good evening, sir. I expected you."

Sennen returned the bow.

"I'm afraid I'm trespassing."

"Not at all, sir, not at all. Let us sit down. Or perhaps you would prefer to walk."

"As you please, sir," said Sennen.

The little old man sat down and, removing that hat with the big brim, laid it carefully on the seat. He had a very white head, and eyes tucked away under bushy eyebrows, and one of those firm, plump faces that are neither old nor young. He struck Sennen as being a mixture of drollness and dignity; he was both puckish and punctilious. An eccentric old gentleman — very.

"You have a wonderful garden, sir," said Sennen.

The dark eyes observed him.

"How did you get in?"

"I'm ashamed to say I climbed over the wall."

The old gentleman went through the action of taking snuff and, producing a big, yellow, silk handkerchief, dusted his coat with it.

"Quite in order. But you have failed to appreciate the fact, sir, that the climbing of walls is inevitable?"

"How so, sir?"

"There is always a wall, sir. What we call a mystery. You solve a mystery by climbing over it.

"Does your wall, sir — ?"

The old gentleman interrupted him.

"For instance, the wall between this world and the next, the wall between you and us. Of course — in these highly scientific days you people remain on the other side of the wall and ignore it, or explain it away, or scoff at the idea that there can be anything on the other side of the wall. Why — you are not even allowed to be conscious."

"Of course," said Sennen to himself, "this nice old fellow is quite

mad. That accounts for the garden."

And then his host startled him.

"I'm sorry your wife is so ill, Mr. Sennen."

Sennen was voiceless. Now, how on earth did the old fellow know? And his name, too.

"Yes; she's dying——"

He gulped, and the old fellow looked at him kindly.

"I must speak to them about that. I suppose you want her. Of course you want her."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"You want her to remain on your side of the wall?"

Sennen's voice was unsteady.

"I shouldn't want to live—if she——"

The old fellow nodded and made a show of taking more snuff.

"Exactly. Also, Messrs. Prout & Sackville might change their minds. I'll have them spoken to."

Said Sennen, with a kind of desperate impulsiveness:

"Look here, sir—who are you? . . ."

And things seemed to fade away.

Sennen woke to find himself lying on the grass at the bottom of a stone wall. It was daylight. A labourer was standing on the edge of the grass, staring at him.

Sennen sat up.

"Hallo! Good morning. I seem to have been asleep."

The man grinned.

"I'd say so, mister. And you've been lying on your hat."

Sennen recovered his hat and persuaded it back into shape. He was beginning to remember.

"I say—can you tell me who lives in the house in there?"

"What house?"

"The house with the twisted chimneys and all those yews clipped like animals and men in the garden."

"There ain't no house."

They stared at each other.

"And there ain't no garden. You've been dreaming, mister. I've heard tell how there used to be a house."

Sennen got up and looked at the wall. There were no beech trees.

He scrambled up and looked over the wall, and saw a grass field with a few cows in it.

"Well — I'm damned!" he said.

What the labourer said to himself was:

"Reckon you were drunk last night."

Sennen found his way back to Firford, and had a wash and was shaved at the village barber's. A little inn near the station gave Sennen breakfast: coffee, bread and butter, and cold ham, though he did not eat much ham. He should have felt desperately depressed, and yet he did not feel depressed. His dream — he called it a dream — remained with him very vividly; it seemed to him that there might be a suggestion of hope in it. But to save his own face he assumed an attitude of cynicism.

He caught the nine-three from Firford. It became full of the usual people going to their usual work and, as the compartment filled up at Walsham, Sennen felt himself being entered and possessed by habit and by all the details of a life of routine. He became again the Sennen of Prout & Sackville's. At Waterloo he went at once down the familiar steps and along the sloping way to the platform where the City train waited. He produced his twopence. He would be late at the office, but he was quite callous about it.

When Sennen pushed open the familiar swing-door, Bates, the commissionaire, looked up from his desk. Bates was a fatherly person with a bald head and a huge, black moustache and with a pleasant plumpness at the waist line.

" 'Morning, Mr. Sennen. Mr. Sackville has been asking for you."

"I'm late."

"I don't think that's got anything to do with it, sir. Mr. Sackville wants to see you. Told me to tell you to go straight to his private room."

"Thank you, Bates."

Sennen went up the stairs and hesitated outside the particular door that concealed a possible hope or a renewed despair. He drew himself up; he knocked. After all — nothing could be worse than the worst.

"Come in!"

Sennen entered, and Sackville smiled at him.

"Oh, it's you, Sennen. I wanted to see you. Sit down. How's your wife — to-day?"

"I was going to see her, sir, but I came here first. I suppose you won't object? . . . I can stay late ——"

Sackville was fingering a typed sheet.

"Of course not. But what I wanted to say was that it suddenly occurred to me last night that we shall have a billet for you — in spite of the reorganization. I was going through some of my notes. Funny — how one misses a step. Same salary. Will that satisfy you?"

Sennen's natural pallor had increased. His mouth felt dry.

"I'm very grateful, sir. I've always tried ——"

"Quite. That's all right, Sennen. I've got your name down. Now, you had better go along and see —— Yes, let me know the news."

Again, in Hallech Street, Sennen experienced that fear of a closed door. He stood on the doorstep of the nursing-home and, after ringing the bell, stared at the brass numerals on the green surface. Thirteen. Surely the omen was not happy.

A nurse opened the door and, like Bates, she smiled at Sennen.

"Good morning."

Sennen clutched his hat.

"How is she? I hope ——"

"Extraordinarily better. There seems to have been a wonderful change in the night."

"Can I see her?"

"Oh, yes; she has been asking for you."

Sennen went up without feeling the stairs under his feet. The nurse opened a door. Marie was propped up on pillows; she looked very pale, but her eyes had a brightness. She held out her hands.

The nurse closed the door, for Sennen was down on his knees beside the bed, kissing his wife's hands.

"Oh, my dear ——"

"Poor boyee. Did I frighten you?"

"They told me ——"

She caressed him, looking at him with the deep glance of a woman conscious of being loved.

"Yes — I thought I was going to die, Stephen. I seemed to be just sinking through the bed. And then I had such a funnee

dream."

He looked at her intently.

"A dream? Tell me!"

"Yes, a funny old man came and stood beside my bed. He had a blue coat with yellow buttons. He was just like a picture out of a book. And there were other people, but I couldn't see them clearly. They looked like ghosts."

Sennen held his breath.

"Did the old man speak to you?"

"Yes. He said: 'Stephen wants you. We have come to tell you that you must stay on your side of the wall.' Now, wasn't that strange! A wall! What did he mean by a wall? But, of course, it was just a dream——"

"Yes," said Sennen — "extraordinary! I — too — had a dream. I'll tell you about it — when you are stronger, *chérie*. Oh, my dear, I'm — I'm so happy!"

Rachel in Search of Reality

She arrived at Barbury station, a dark, silent, self-contained young woman, neatly dressed in black. Her trunk of green fibre was removed from the van and trundled on a truck to the entrance, where two or three cars were waiting. A young chauffeur in dark blue livery, his cap pushed back, removed a cigarette and eyed the green trunk.

"Anyone for Barbury Place? Anyone for Barbury Place?"

He was the obvious wag, the young fellow-my-lad in uniform but very much off duty. The elderly porter turned the trunk in his direction.

"Something for you, Bossy."

"Right you are, old man. We've clicked."

He smiled at the dark girl, who was obviously the owner of the green trunk.

"This is our bus, miss."

He jerked a thumb at an old four-seater car that did duty as a staff and luggage car at Barbury Place. His grin was friendly and familiar. He opened the near front door.

"Bates—that's me. Nice evenin' for a drive."

He looked at her, and his blue eyes seemed to lose their easy, shallow smile, for the girl was not responsive. She gave him a curt nod and, opening the rear door for herself, got in.

The chauffeur, with an ironic and perplexed adjustment of his cap, went behind to assist in strapping the green trunk to the grid. The stump of the cigarette remained between his lips. He was saying things to himself, things that could not be said to the elderly porter without the girl overhearing them.

"Ain't she 'aughty? Back seat. Well, I'm blowed! Why, the real ladies are much more pally."

He climbed into the driver's seat, slammed the door with a suggestion of swagger, and drove her to Barbury Place at forty-five

miles an hour.

Barbury Place stood on the southern slope of a hill and in the midst of a park. Everything was old about it, the beeches and the cedars and the magnificent chestnuts, the terrace, the walled garden, the lake. But not quite everything; for there were two new hard tennis courts close to the rose garden, and a bright timber and plaster garage splashed and spoilt the blurred harmony of the older buildings. The garage had to house five cars, and at week-ends there would be yet more cars.

Also, the Crasswell family was not ancient. Someone had described them as "Hims and Hers, Ancient and Modern, Revised Version."

Bates drove her round to the back of the hall, and skipping out, with an ironic hat in his hand, opened the door for her.

"We have arrived, madam. Mrs. Mills should be waiting to receive you."

Mrs. Mills was the housekeeper; also she was the wife of Mr. Mills, the butler. She had a sitting-room of her own which she shared with Mr. Mills and a Yorkshire terrier, but Mr. Mills was there on sufferance. In the passage a girl's head was poked out of the staff-room doorway, and a very up-to-date young person greeted the new arrival.

"Hello! Name of Smith?"

The dark girl smiled and nodded.

"The new housemaid."

"I'm parlour. Name of Sass. The old girl wants you upstairs. She left word."

"What, Mrs. Crasswell?"

"No; old Mother Mills. I'll show you."

Miss Smith was shown the way up to the housekeeper's room, where the Yorkshire terrier yapped at her.

Mrs. Mills was a formidable person with a fringe and a big bosom, and the girth of her suggested that a voluminous voice should emanate from the chair in which she sat.

"Miss Smith, I suppose?"

Mrs. Mills' voice was a little squeak. It reminded the girl of the sound emitted by one of those figures which — when squeezed —

give out a thin complaint. But the housekeeper did not wait for a reply, but went on addressing her, for Mrs. Mills always had plenty to say, and the more mute you remained the more quickly the discourse was done with. She observed the girl. She did not ask her to sit down, but Miss Smith did sit down.

"I hope you are up to your work."

"I believe so."

"It's an exacting house. I always believe in being frank, though it isn't so easy to face both ways. Bribery — that's it. You're one of those who have to be bribed to come down here. Well, there's plenty of bribery, and the tips are not so bad. There's wireless, and a gramophone, and a weekly dance, and a car into Woking or Guildford twice a week, though I can't say I think much of either place, if you ask me. And you're to get sixty. That's the situation."

The dark girl nodded.

"Caps worn?"

"Caps — are — worn. Now you had better go and get your tea."

The dark girl smiled and went towards the door, but Mrs. Mills had one other remark to make.

"You look a quiet, dignified sort of girl. Some of the gentlemen who come down here are a bit larky. Keep it in mind."

"Thank you, I will."

So Miss Rachel Smith had her tea in the staff-room and made the acquaintance of the cook and Mrs. Crasswell's French maid and the various other ladies who lived and worked at Barbury Place. They were a cheerful and a friendly crowd, and they had no illusions as to the splendour of the Crasswell family. No one had.

Rachel found that her room overlooked the fruit garden and the wooded hillside behind the house. It was not a bad little room, and she unpacked and changed into her uniform, and at six o'clock she went on duty under the direction of Mrs. Mills.

The Crasswell family had its idiosyncrasies, and it was as well for her to know them. Mr. Crasswell disliked any interference with the books and papers on the table beside his bed, and he took dry toast with his early morning tea. Mrs. Crasswell disliked conversation in the early morning. The Misses Crasswell preferred pulling up their own blinds, and a discreet maid would leave Mr. Tony Crasswell to pull up his.

Rachel did a tour of the upper floors of Barbury Place. It had been very much renovated in the new style, and it had bedsteads that were painted blue and scarlet and yellow, and sofas with zigzag patterns and cushions of black and orange and purple. The Misses Crasswell kept gramophones in their bedrooms.

Rachel's introduction to the Crasswell family was gradual and incidental.

Mr. Crasswell, very large and red, with a flat head and staring blue eyes, seemed to float about the place like a thunderstorm seeking an explosion. He was very rich and very irritable. There were occasions when he shouted. His wife had an equine face and a bosom of sound dimensions, like a cushion very tightly stuffed. She spoke haughtily.

Miss Pip and Miss Polly were long, leggy young women with Eton crops and carefully cultivated complexions. They talked like a snappy gossip on the wireless.

Mr. Tony wore sky-blue and cerise pyjamas, and had his morning bath at nine, and used solid brilliantine on his very black hair, and did nothing in particular—and did not do it very well.

Rachel had no conversation with the members of the Crasswell family. They were people apart.

Mr. Crasswell grunted when she entered his room in the morning.

"Your tea, sir."

"Put it there."

She ceased to announce the arrival of his tea. She went swiftly and silently about her affairs. She had much to do, and the Misses Crasswell provided her with et ceteras. They were incredibly casual and untidy. They threw things about, stockings, shoes, undies, dresses. They never put anything away. They were abrupt and exacting.

"Smith, there's something off my knickers. See to it."

Or—"Smith, I'm out of gramophone needles. Get some up from the music-room."

They were expensive, expansive, restless young women. They would turn a car out at ten o'clock at night, and rush up to some night-club. They started up their gramophones while they were dressing in the morning. They were far more active than their

brother, who put eau-de-Cologne into his shaving water, and went up to town looking like a male mannequin—an exquisite drooping lily of a lad.

Barbury Place contained two worlds, and the lower world stood in no awe of the upper one. It was completely candid in its criticisms. It made fun of the Crasswell family; it had nicknames for all its members.

Mr. Crasswell was "Old Rhino;" his wife, "Mrs. Buster Brown;" the young ladies, "Pip and Squeak;" Mr. Anthony, "The Little Bow-wow." A most irreverent crowd, and especially so when Mr. Crasswell expected to be knighted, and Mrs. Crasswell's bosom was preparing to add yet another cushion to its distinguished but unfashionable firmness.

Rachel was very much amused. She found the staff-room breezy yet a little tiring, but the Crasswells were gorgeous. She rolled them under her tongue. She went about with a demure, aloof apartness. She watched and listened, and laughed within herself. Yes, they were gorgeous. She wallowed in the splendour of these charming people. Almost she loved them.

But that was a passing mood. There came a time when she ceased to love them, because she became infected with somebody else's secret shame and hatred. It happened quite suddenly.

There were week-end parties at Barbury Place.

One week-end in June Mr. Crasswell, having been lodged at his London flat for some days, returned to Barbury with his secretary. Mr. Main had been to Barbury on other occasions, but not during Rachel's maidship, and when she first cast eyes upon him she was puzzled. There was something about Mr. Richard Main that set her wondering.

He was a fiercely restrained, palely polite young man, yet not so very young. He had a scar on one cheek. His eyes suggested wounded prides and secret dissatisfactions. He was very silent; he went about silently; he appeared to spend most of his time in the library.

Rachel heard Mr. Crasswell shouting for Mr. Main.

"Main—Main!"

"Yes, sir."

"Why don't you keep about?"

"I was in the library, sir, waiting for you."

"I don't want a man in the library when I'm rowing with the head chauffeur, do I? Too much petrol used here. You've got to check it."

Something in Rachel grew hot and combative. How dared that commercial bully shout at his secretary like a farmer at a plough-boy! And why did Main stand it?

In the staff-room she heard the secretary referred to as Mr. Main. He had no nickname. Apparently, for some reason or other, he was liked and respected. Even the hoity-toity Miss Sass allowed him to be a gentleman and a "sport." The staff were sorry for Mr. Main.

For Mr. Main had committed a ghastly blunder. He wrote poetry; he had published a volume of poems, and he had allowed the Crasswell family to discover this secret scottishness. Apparently they had found Mr. Main as a poet intensely and toppingly funny. Mr. Tony always referred to him as "The Bard."

Rachel, in the course of her duties, had to go into Mr. Main's room. It was a poor little room, high up in one of the gables and facing north, yet Mr. Main managed to have a table by the window, and it was obvious to Rachel that Mr. Main sat at that table and worked. Rachel allowed herself to glance at the papers on Mr. Main's table, and she discovered half the body and soul of a sonnet. It began—"What a slave of sottishness am I?" She read five or six lines, and then turned away as though she had caught herself prying into the man's secret humiliations.

Mr. Main kept a photograph on the table, and out of the little round silver frame a gentle and elderly face looked at the world with tired yet humorous eyes. Yes; obviously it was the face of Mr. Main's mother. The likeness between them was evident.

Miss Smith was touched, though the soul of a housemaid is not supposed to be touched by lyric sadness and suffering. But she had remembered something, and her compassion was able to allow itself the flicker of a secret smile.

For Mr. Main's martyrdom was relative. Being what he was, he heated his own hot plate and walked on it with naked, sensitive feet. Pip and Squeak were raffish young women, and a man with

less of Mr. Main's looks and more beef to his soul might have found compensations.

But, as it was, they persecuted. Always they addressed him as Mr. Main, as though carefully classing him one grade below Mr. Mills, the butler.

"Mr. Main, get out the cushions, will you?" or, "Mr. Main, did you order those tennis balls?"

They did not catch him out on these details. He was too murderously thorough both in his functioning and in his pride. He allowed them no self-made opportunities; but with Mr. Anthony it was otherwise. He might be Mr. Crasswell's pup, but he would be no pup to Tony.

Rachel happened to overhear that row. It happened somewhere on the stairs. It was heard or seen by no one else.

"Oh — I say — Mr. Main. You might go and tell Bates that I want the 'Spitz,' at two sharp."

There was a moment of silence.

"I'm not an errand-boy. I suggest that you ——"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass, Main."

"You can go to hell, my lad."

Which rude forcefulness caused Rachel a little tremor of approval. She looked over the rail and saw Mr. Anthony mincing down the stairs and Main looking as though he was restraining a foot. Though Mr. Anthony sneaked to his father.

"That fellow Main's getting a bit uppish."

Mr. Crasswell had a liver.

"You leave Main alone; he's my pup."

It became evident to Rachel that she was giving more service to Mr. Main's little room than any of the Crasswell chambers. She noticed that he had things that needed mending. She noticed that he was writing a short story, and also, having read three pages of it, she knew that it was a very good short story. Also, she became aware of the fact that Mr. Main looked at her queerly whenever they met or passed. Always he was cautious, a little shy, friendly.

"Good morning, Smith. Somebody put flowers ——"

"Did they, sir?"

"Thank you."

"I think it was someone else, sir."

"Oh, possibly."

There came a day when Rachel was dusting the library, and Mr. Main walked in with a letter file and a book of accounts, and sat down at the desk, and Rachel offered to remove herself.

"I shall be disturbing you, sir."

"Not a bit. Please continue."

She continued, and he sat down at the desk and arranged his papers, and there was the silence of their mutual and almost noiseless activities. Rachel had to move the steps to get at another shelf, and she had reascended the steps when she became aware of him speaking.

"Haven't been here long, have you?"

He was speaking to her.

"No, Mr. Main."

"Staying long?"

"I don't know."

"Most of you don't. What a blessed thing is the scarcity of labour! I would——"

But he pulled himself up. He rustled the leaves of the ledger; he bent over the desk, and she went on with her dusting. He was entering items in the ledger, and his shoulders looked intent and rebellious.

And then, suddenly, he rose to get some papers and looked at her fixedly.

"Where have I seen you before?"

She went on with her dusting, taking out book after book, and flicking it with her feather duster.

"Have you seen me before, sir?"

"Sure of it."

"Where?"

"For the life of me I can't remember. I have been worrying about it for days."

"Surely there is no need to worry, sir."

"But I have seen you somewhere else. Where was it?"

"How should I know, Mr. Main?"

"Then you don't know?"

"How should I?"

He stared at her, and his stare was a little embarrassing.

"Yours is not the sort of face one forgets."

"It is a very ordinary sort of face, Mr. Main. I'm quite familiar with it."

"Oh, possibly. But I have seen you somewhere."

He was very persistent, and she continued busy with the books.

"Is this your usual job?"

"What, sir?"

"Domestic service."

She looked down at him with a whimsical smile.

"Well—I have done other things."

"What things?"

"I have worked in a factory."

"Indeed!"

"I have been a Lyons girl."

"A Nippy! Rather extraordinary."

"Not a bit, sir. Then I was in a shop—two shops."

"Your experience seems to have been rather varied."

"Doesn't it? Perhaps you saw me in a shop."

"What kind of shop?"

"A draper's at Clapham. Do you know Clapham, Mr. Main?"

"Never been there in my life."

"It could not have been there, then, could it?"

But there were voices in the hall, and Main turned again to his desk, and she went on with her dusting.

For the rest of that particular week-end Mr. Main and Miss Smith were kept apart by circumstances over which neither of them chose to exercise control, and on Monday Mr. Main returned to town with Mr. Crasswell. He left behind him in his bedroom a quantity of socks and shirts and et ceteras that needed attention, and also the typescript of a novel.

Miss Smith contrived to do Mr. Main's mending, and also to read a portion of his novel. She smuggled whole chapters of it to her room, and was surprised to find that it was a remarkable novel, for of all the secret novels that are written probably but one in a thousand is worth even the most casual attention.

Mr. Crasswell and his secretary came down to Barbury Place on the following Saturday. There was tension between them, which meant that Mr. Crasswell had mislaid his temper and that Mr. Main had to preserve his.

Mr. Main, when proceeding to unpack, found his novel where he had left it, under a pair of pale cotton pyjamas. But he was an observant person. Something had been done to the pyjamas, and also to the neat piles of vests and socks and shirts.

At half-past six Miss Smith brought him a can of hot water.

"Good evening, sir."

He confronted her.

"Someone has been at my things."

"Oh, sir?"

"Yes — I'm — I'm much obliged. It was awfully decent of you."

"Of me, sir? Perhaps it was Mrs. Mills."

He said looking at her fixedly:

"I'm quite sure it wasn't Mrs. Mills."

Now, on the Sunday, God spoke. He spoke to Mr. Main in the library, and he spoke loudly and with passion, and Rachel happened to be Eve, an innocent and coincidental Eve listening outside a door.

Mr. Crasswell held forth.

"Look here, what do I pay you for? Damn it — I can't look into everything. I've told you over and over again that you are to be responsible for all the accounts down here. It's perfectly monstrous. Petrol! Look at that bill. Seven new tyres in a month."

"Well, sir, the cars are used a good deal."

"Yes; but, damn it, I'm being done, and it's your business to see that I'm not done. Then — the garden. Thirty loads of cow manure! Do they eat manure?"

"I should hardly think so, sir."

"Look here, I don't want you to be facetious. If this sort of thing isn't stopped, I'll fire you. Understand that. Now you go and have it out with the chaps in the garage. Check all the speedometers. See?"

"I see, sir."

"Well, get on with it."

Mr. Main, emerging from the library with a face of whiteness and of silent fury, found Rachel leaning against an oak table.

one was playing with her feather duster. She did not look directly at him, for she knew that he did not wish to be looked at, with his pride thrashed into rags.

She said:

"Mr. Main, I am leaving to-morrow. Do I give you notice? I'd rather prefer to give it to Mr. Crasswell personally."

"Leaving?"

She looked at him.

"Why don't you do it too?"

He reddened. He glanced fiercely out of the window.

"That's my business."

"Of course. But when you can write a short story like 'City Smoke,' why stay here?"

His head gave a jerk. He went and stood over her.

"Look here, who are you? What the devil do you mean——?"

She caressed the feathers of the duster.

"My name is Rachel Smith North."

His face expressed astonishment, sudden illumination.

"Good Lord! Of course—I remember now. It was the Authors' Club dinner. But what the devil are you doing here, a best seller, a——?"

She said:

"I'm a rather thorough person, Mr. Main. I like reality. I like to write about reality, and when I want to know about reality, I live it for a couple of months."

He stared.

"Well—I'm——!"

"And that's a rather remarkable novel of yours, too."

"What d'you mean?"

"I did your mending while you were away, and so I didn't see why I shouldn't have some pleasure out of it. I got it out of your novel."

For a moment he was mute.

"But—I say—you know——"

"Why not send that novel to my agent? I shall be seeing him to-morrow."

"It's most awfully——"

"Not a bit."

"You see, I've had to stick this. My mater, left without a half-penny. She's a——"

The feather duster gave a suggestive flick.

"Well, what about it? I'll go in first. I suggest that we go to-day; there's a train at 12.30. I think I can get that story of yours placed in three days. Risk it?"

"By George—I will."

She smiled, waved the duster, and passed into the room. He heard her voice.

"Excuse me, Mr. Crasswell, but I am giving notice."

"What! Who are you? Oh, yes——"

"I find that the atmosphere of this house does not agree with me. It's too—too—shall we say—uncultivated."

"What! Here—you—— Clear out, go and be rude to my secretary."

The door opened and Main stood there.

"Did you call, sir?"

"Here, Main, this young woman——"

"Excuse me, sir, but I have come to tell you that I am leaving this morning. I find that the atmosphere of this house does not agree with me. It is too—uncultivated."

Mr. Crasswell's jaw fell.

"Well—I'm—— What's the game?"

Mr. Main bowed to him.

"Good morning, sir."

He turned to Miss Smith and smiled, and Mr. Crasswell saw his secretary and the housemaid go out arm-in-arm.

Ridicule

THERE WERE FEW THINGS THAT MARTIN ISHERWOOD HAD NOT DONE successfully. By the age of forty-seven he had experienced only one considerable failure, but having married the wrong woman he had been spared the full consequences of this one failure, for his wife had run away with his worst enemy, and Isherwood, after settling a thousand a year on her for life, had said:

"Thank God!"

He sat in the bow window of a very famous club in St. James's Street, with one of the faded puce-coloured curtains drawn to keep off the afternoon sunlight. The world went by beneath him — his world, the world in which he cut no inconsiderable figure. Bald heads reposed about him. Panter, one of the club waiters, was discreetly removing empty coffee-cups.

Isherwood beckoned to Panter.

"Yes, sir?"

"Bring me 'Who's Who.'"

"Yes, sir."

Panter brought Martin Isherwood "Who's Who," and delivered it with the impressiveness of a local mayor presenting a casket to royalty, and Isherwood opened the book and looked himself up in it.

Yes, there he was, with all his successes. The whole social pattern of his life was nicely woven in a column of some twenty lines. Anybody could look up Martin Isherwood and discover that he had a town house in Clarges Street and that his country place was Isherwood Court. The garlands of his many accomplishments hung about him.

He had rowed in the Oxford boat; for five years he had sat in the "House," for a Hampshire constituency; he had explored the Amazon; he had shot in the English team at Bisley; he had owned racehorses and had won races with them. He was something

of an authority on English water-colour art and on Chinese lacquer. His publications included a treatise on "Rural Education," and a "Fisherman's Log off Florida." He hunted; he played golf; and his clubs were the Carlton and Jerrys. His age was forty-seven. He had no children. Unofficially it was known that he was a very marriageable man.

Isherwood closed the book and placed it on the mahogany table beside him. He meditated. He had arrived at one of those moments when the ordered level of life's road bored him. He was so secure. He had nothing to fear.

Yet he was aware of a sense of unreality. His mood was tending towards irony.

How easy life was — like the routine of this club, where you rang a bell and a polite servant came to satisfy your desires. But was life so easy? Could he not ascribe this seeming easiness to the fact that he was so well protected by circumstances?

Yes; and by the conventions. He behaved in a certain way; he dressed in a particular style; he did — in the main — all that these bald-headed gentlemen did, and so ordered his life that he was nicely inconspicuous.

Yes, the conventional atmosphere of his class, its habits of thought and of behavior. Provided you did nothing eccentric!

And supposing — supposing he were to rise from his chair with a yell and pitch "Who's Who," at one of these bald heads? No, there would be no scene. Jerrys did not countenance scenes. There would be dignified surprise. Isherwood could picture Gurney, the secretary, being sent for, also Howarth, that monumental porter. "Mr. Isherwood is not quite himself. His case would be considered as either mental or alcoholic.

The voice of his own restlessness accused him, the murmur of a vague dissatisfaction.

"Yes, you are afraid. And ridicule is the thing you are afraid of. Your success depends on your tailor. Ridicule, ridicule that is more terrible than Mrs. Grundy."

Isherwood reflected. His fresh-coloured face assumed a combative expression.

"Now — supposing — for instance — that you were to appear in public without your tie?"

The inward and mocking voice now challenged him.

"You daren't do it. You have shot tigers, but you haven't the courage to walk down Piccadilly without a tie."

It became obvious from his inward and immediate reaction that Isherwood was less of the social beast than the world imagined. There was a strain of Puckishness in him, and at the age of forty-seven, when a man is rather alone in the world and has lost nine-tenths of his illusions, his sense of humour may become mischievously grim. An ironical playfulness is apt to grimace at the world.

"You dare not do it," said the voice.

"Confound you, but—I—will do it," the Puck in Isherwood retorted.

He left Jerrys and returned to Clarges Street. He had been wearing a grey lounge suit, and Verity, his valet, following him upstairs, and needing no suggestions, laid out a morning coat and vest and pair of dark striped trousers.

"Right, you need not wait, Verity."

Half an hour later Verity met his master on the lower landing. Verity had the impressive face of a Chinaman, but he received the shock of his life.

"Excuse me, sir——"

Isherwood's eyes conveyed a casual interrogation.

"You are not—quite—dressed, sir."

"Oh?"

"Your tie, sir."

Isherwood continued calmly down the stairs towards the hall.

"I have given up ties, Verity."

He went out into Clarges Street, leaving his valet a problem that was far knottier and more urgent than anything that Einstein had evolved.

Isherwood returned to St. James's Street, conscious of being the inspirer of occasional surprise and amusement. Piccadilly had been too busy with its own affairs to trouble to observe the fact that a well-dressed man had forgotten his tie.

Twenty yards down St. James's Street he met the Hon. Sylvia Curmody, a woman with a high colour and a hard blue roving eye. Her glance went instantly to that tieless expanse of shirt and collar. She nodded unsmilingly, and Isherwood raised his hat.

"I have met my publicity agent," he thought, "and by to-morrow night it will be known everywhere that Martin Isherwood has been seen in St. James's Street without a tie."

Would they say that he was in love or approaching a sudden senility?

And, after all, did it matter?

At Jerrys he turned aside to the little glass-fronted holy of holies where Howarth, the hall porter, sat on a leather-topped stool. Howarth and Jerrys had lived a symbolic life for thirty years, and there were people to whom the bald, round-faced, massive porter was a greater man than any member of the club.

"Any letters, Howarth?"

Howarth might have been doorkeeper to the gods. Nothing flurried him. He looked straight at you through his gold-rimmed spectacles. He was polite, but with that air of superior and tolerant politeness that one associates with police sergeants.

"No, sir."

Of course he had observed the monstrous lapse. Only one other occasion had Howarth had to exercise his immense sagacity in dealing with such a problem, and that had been when old Sir Hercules Crutchet had forgotten a certain detail of his toilet. As the writers of the active school put it, Howarth did some rapid thinking.

"One moment, sir. Do you mind looking in the glass behind you."

"What's the matter, Howarth?"

"Well, sir, something has fallen off, unless——"

It was inconceivable that a member of Jerrys should wear a ready-made bow-tie.

Isherwood dealt with the insinuation.

"Howarth, do you really suggest, man, that I buy my ties made up?"

"No, sir."

"Right. I think you said there were no letters?"

"No letters, sir."

Isherwood ascended the steps to the pillared lobby, and Howarth removed his spectacles and polished the lenses with a very clean

handkerchief. Had Mr. Isherwood really forgotten to put on a tie? If so ——

Well, it might be a "wager." A sporting challenge might justify a gentleman's parading in St. James's Street in a suit of pyjamas. Perhaps it had been tactless of him to refer to the detail? Howarth felt ruffled, and when one of the club pages appeared giggling in the lobby doorway, Howarth dealt with him as irresponsible urchins should be dealt with.

Isherwood strolled into the smoking-room. He had made the first plunge and overcome the terror that seizes upon the social man when he discovers himself to be differing conspicuously from his fellows. He was conscious of a sense of adventure. And how absurd that one should be able to capture the spirit of adventure by omitting to put on a tie!

He nodded to several acquaintances, and stood for a moment by Peter Blunt's chair and discussed with him the imminent political crisis. Blunt had observed the lapse, but he treated Isherwood as a creature of sanity. Still, the lapse was there, and in the back of his mind Blunt was asking questions concerning the Isherwood family history. And had Isherwood's youth been what it should have been?

"It's a matter of suggestion, my dear chap; everything is suggestion."

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Isherwood, strolling across to the table where the daily papers were kept.

He had sighted the club bore standing by the newspaper table — one General Crackenthorn — who had a fatal passion for seizing the obvious and holding it under his fellows' noses. Isherwood wished to try the effect of his tielessness upon Crackenthorn.

The general put up his eye-glass. He became immensely solemn. He tapped Isherwood quite confidentially upon the shoulder.

He whispered the horrid truth.

"My dear Isherwood — one moment — your tie — my dear fellow."

Isherwood stared.

"My tie, general? What about it?"

Crackenthorn's whisper grew more pontifical.

"You haven't got a tie."

Isherwood smiled brightly.

"Is that so? Well, it's the first original thing that has happened in this club since old Trelawney died while he was writing that hundred and first letter of his to *The Times*."

Crackenthorn looked greatly shocked. A man did not wax facetious when he had committed such a solecism unless he was a rather vulgar person or touched in the head. Crackenthorn had expected Isherwood to disappear instantly into some secret refuge, and to remain there until the great Howarth had despatched an urgent message to Clarges Street.

In the general's mind Isherwood was from that moment a man to be watched — a suspect.

His tielessness was to have been the self-mockery of a day, but Isherwood found the experiment so intriguing that he continued to go about offending against the normal prejudices of his fellows. Also, it must be confessed, that he discovered a mischievous pleasure in being different. He enjoyed the self-conscious smirk of the nonconformist. His pose was not quite forgetful of mirrors.

He became aware of a subtle change in the atmosphere of Jerrys. He found himself being observed over the tops of books and newspapers. He was a case, a suspect. The attitude of the club towards him was one of kind but silent suspicion. He more than suspected that the absence of Isherwood's tie was discussed at the meetings of the house committee.

Yet he had not changed. He was the same Isherwood. All that had happened centred itself about a minor deficiency in his toilet. And yet, absurd though it seemed, his whole life and its atmosphere was being altered by the absence of a tie.

Men avoided him. Insensibly he became isolated. And then, one day at lunch, Sir Morton Prince came and seated himself at the table where Isherwood sat solitary in his corner by one of the windows.

Sir Morton smiled at him. He had the head of a sagacious and a kindly satyr, and he was one of the most noted of alienists. Isherwood could claim him as a club acquaintance.

"Very dark in here these days. I don't wonder that you prefer a window."

He gave Isherwood a look of veiled shrewdness.

"Yes, Sir Morton, like Goethe my cry is for more light."

Sir Morton reached for the menu card, and while he was evolving

his lunch, Isherwood indulged in silent comments.

"I'll bet that he has been asked by the committee to come and tactfully investigate my mental state. I'm a case!"

Sir Morton, having ordered his lunch, beamed upon Isherwood, and engaged him in conversation. Sir Morton was an amusing conversationalist, and Isherwood played up to him. They discussed bobbed heads and Wembley, and the language of Labour, and Sir Morton got nothing out of Isherwood. The fellow was as sound and as rosy as a well-ripened apple.

Afterwards, Sir Morton met the secretary and one or two paternal committee men in a corner of the deserted library.

"The fellow seems as sane as I am. But — then — of course — one has to remember that some of these cases begin in this way. Just a faint crack in a man's sanity, some seemingly trivial lapse ——"

"But what are we to do about it?"

"What can you do about it? You can't ask a member of Isherwood's standing to resign because he omits to wear a tie. Of course — had it been trousers ——"

It was agreed that the case was one for observation.

Nevertheless, some officious friend communicated with Isherwood's relatives, and on returning to Clarges Street one afternoon he found Grace Lambrick — his married sister — sitting in his drawing-room. She lived in Devonshire. Her first glance betrayed to Isherwood the esoteric significance of her visit.

"Hallo, Gracie, I didn't know you were in town!"

"Oh, just up for some shopping!"

"Well, you can pour out my tea."

She never referred to the absence of his tie, though she had been putting Verity through a careful cross-examination. She talked about the children, and how Jack had got into the Eton boat, and about Lambrick's bronchitis, and how horribly difficult it was to get servants. And she went away puzzled. She refused to dine with him at Claridges. She had a bit of a head "shopping, you know," and she was catching the Exeter express on the morrow.

"Poor old Gracie," thought Isherwood; "she couldn't face Claridges with a man without a tie. Well, I don't blame her."

A moment later, old Isumbras Isherwood — his uncle — dropped down out of the sky. Isumbras was a rather abrupt person; he lived

in Sussex, and believed in calling a dung-man exactly what it was.

"Look here, my boy, what's all this about your not wearing a tie!"

"So you have heard about it?"

"I should think I have! Well, what about it?"

"Exactly," said Isherwood, "what about it?"

Their conversation developed towards an extreme frankness, and Uncle Isumbras left Clarges Street with the air of a man who has had a difference of opinion with his solicitor.

"Damned rot!"

His philosophy of life could carry him no further.

The experiment had proved both uncomfortable and interesting, and Isherwood had discovered that when once you had mocked your fellow-men boldly and conscientiously the worst was over. It resembled the taking of a cold plunge. You came out greatly invigorated. But the result depended upon your motives. There had to be no self-conscious flinching, and society started badly if one face and defied like a fussy old woman, would proceed to cover the rebel's nakedness with seemly excuses. "The eccentric Mr. Isherwood." To label a man eccentric will still allow him to have a card on your hall table.

But Isherwood discovered more than this. He discovered loneliness. It was all very well to have a jest against your class fellows, but the jest needed sharing, and preferably by a woman.

Deplorable bachelor that he was. Even the pragmatic Verity treated him as a potential lunatic.

Conversely, it was necessary for him to remain eminent, or, having proved his courage in going tieless through London, he could share the jest only with a woman who could show equal courage.

And Isherwood was sure that such a woman did not exist.

None the less, some six months ago he had contemplated the possibility of a second marriage, but he had not moved beyond contemplation, perhaps because the one most possible woman had gone to Malta for the winter. There were at least half a dozen other women who had been ready to oblige him, but he had to admit that his tieless collar had cured them of their commonness. He was unique.

But Sanchia — Sanchia Mordaunt?

He had always credited her with a sense of humour, and his

newly discovered loneliness emphasized Sanchia's aloofness. One of those tall, dark, supple and rather silent women. Her silences had rendered the ordinary social babblers inarticulate. A man can be a very shy bird at forty-seven, and Isherwood had been very shy of eager women.

But what would Sanchia think of his quixotry? Would it matter to her that he had discarded his tie? Would she understand the inwardness of his puckish protest?

Their meeting was sudden and unheralded. It happened at the corner of New Bond Street, and for the first time since the beginning of his experiment Isherwood was false to his ideal. He regretted the absence of a tie.

"Hallo! So you are back again?"

She smiled at him, and he had a sudden feeling that he had nothing to fear from her deep eyes.

"I have been back for a month. And what have you been doing?"

"Oh; playing the fool!" he said.

She seemed quite unaware of the absence of his tie. She did not look at him with the diagnostic eyes of a doctor. In fact, he detected a little glimmer of sympathetic mischief somewhere beneath the polished surface of her serenity.

"It does one good," she observed.

"You think so?"

"Some of it. Provided——"

"Provided one knows where to stop?"

"Exactly."

Isherwood faced the crisis.

"Which way are you going?"

"Park Lane way."

"May I——?"

She gave him a glance of subtly expressed surprise.

"Of course," it said. "Why be so formal?"

They turned and walked along Piccadilly, and Isherwood began to repent of his momentary falseness. He had had a moment of illumination. The seal of his seeming eccentricity might prove a secret sign, a Masonic symbol. Sanchia had accepted it and had said nothing. She sailed along beside him like a tranquil young goddess, and when her eyes met his he felt that she was laughing with him

at the world's conventions.

"Heavens!" he thought, "she's enjoying it! She's not afraid."

They entered the park and wandering through it with the leisureliness of two people who were mutually appreciative they sat down on two chairs overlooking the water. And Isherwood smiled. He prepared for the final ordeal.

"Doing anything to-night?"

"No."

"I want to ask you to dine with me somewhere. Will you?"

"I should love it."

"Even with the eccentric Martin Isherwood?"

"Yes," she said, and her glance was a laughing acceptance of the challenge.

"Splendid," he said; "I have a sort of feeling that Diogenes can come out of his tub."

They had been observed, and without their having noticed the observer, but about half-past three that afternoon an old friend called upon Sanchia Mordaunt at her flat in Ashley Gardens. The visitor was one of those eagerly affectionate persons, and a very modern type, with an effusive manner and a cold eye.

"My dear, I should have been here before, but I have been down in the country. And I suppose you have had a gorgeous time. Yes, of course. And I want to hear all about it."

From women who "my deared" you Sanchia always expected the Judas kiss. Also, Molly Courthope was a widow, ingenious, absurdly youthful, with a ginger coloured and shingled head. And Sanchia remained expectant. She gave the snake a cigarette and made it curl itself up on the sofa.

"Well, what's the news?"

"Our news? Oh, nothing very startling. Vi Carver has run off with a jockey. And poor Marie has twins."

"What a lapse!"

"And Martin Isherwood. I suppose you have heard about poor old Martin?"

"No. What is Martin's trouble?"

"Clean off his nut, you know — goes about without a tie, and doesn't know people. His relations are awfully worried."

"How sad," said Sanchia serenely; "poor old Martin. Does it run

in the family?"

"No. That is why they are so annoyed. I believe some of his people want to get him certified."

"Quite harmless, I suppose?"

Mrs. Courthope was not quite sure.

"I hear he has awful rages."

Having planted the poison Mrs. Courthope threw away the stump of her third cigarette, carefully powdered her nose, and then passed breezily on to her next social duty.

"So long, old dear. I've got to dance at the Miskins. Fed up with dancing."

Sanchia followed her to the door.

"Yes, it does get a bit boring. I'm thinking of returning to the country and taking up gardening."

She smiled, and her smile should have suggested to Molly Courthope that Sanchia had discovered the antidote to the particular social poison that the brisk widow always carried under her tongue.

Sanchia dressed herself with particular care, and if her mirror was a candid friend, at least it was a kind one. Punctually at 7.45 her taxi deposited her at the doorway of the St. Cloud. Isherwood was waiting for her in the foyer. He wore no tie.

Her level eyes met his, and did not drop below his collar, and in Isherwood's eyes there was a new homage.

"I make my obeisance," he said.

She smiled.

"To me?"

"To a brave woman."

They stood considering each other for a moment in the crowded and conventionally fashionable foyer. Then Isherwood offered her his arm.

"You said brave."

"I did."

"Might it not be designing?"

He glanced down at her.

"I think not. Courage and a sense of humour — what!"

The head-waiter met them, and with discreet composure bowed them to the table that Isherwood had reserved.

"The wine list, sir?"

"Please."

The great Howarth was sorting letters behind his glass screen when Mr. Martin Isherwood made his next appearance at Jerrys.

"'Morning, Howarth, any letters for me?"

Howarth was never guilty of staring, but he could not help being interested in the fact that Mr. Isherwood was wearing a tie, and the particular sort of tie that well-dressed men considered it necessary for them to wear at the moment.

"One letter, sir."

"Thank you, Howarth."

Mr. Isherwood ascended the steps leaving Howarth to reflect upon the phenomenon.

"Never seen him better dressed, or looking fitter. Now, what's Mr. Isherwood been at?"

Jerrys asked the same question, but the club was never honoured with a satisfactory answer, unless of course it could be expected to disentangle an answer from a subsequent announcement in the *Morning Post* that a marriage had been arranged between Mr. Martin Isherwood and Miss Sanchia Mordaunt.

The Great Saaba Bridge

THERE IS IN MAN A FEROCITY THAT TURNS TO STAND AT BAY WITH bared teeth when Nature balks it, the old Ajax spirit, ready to give blow for blow and curse for curse but in the man of highly civilized contrivings the struggle is driven inwards. Therefore, indeed, it may be more grim and protracted, more full of wanton and casual interference on Nature's part, more stiff with hatred and defiance for the man.

The looker-on may be deeply involved in the struggle, or merely mischievously curious, but in the matter of the Saaba Bridge Grace Ramsden was sunk in it to the lips and eyes, silently perhaps, for the woman's part may be a silent one.

She had learnt to smile and to keep quiet, and to show a courage that is all the greater because it has to support in silence the courage of another. She passed the days and nights in that scorched and simmering tin bungalow on the dusty hillside, worn thin with the summer heat, waiting upon the gruff and fiercely combative moods of a man who once had loved her.

In a way, she supposed, he loved her still, but like a man in a delirium, or like one half dazed and all bloody with giving blows and taking them.

"I'm his shield-bearer," was all that she could say to herself. "If I fail him he will fail too."

She sat in a deck-chair on the stoep of their bungalow, watching the tawniness of the landscape turn to orange, with the mountains tinted blue. Below her lay the Saaba River, muddy and sluggish, oiling its way sulkily in its central and circuitous channel, with all the strong flood-flats beside it looking scorched and hateful.

She saw the grey sweep of her husband's bridge, the huts and workshops, the dumps of stone and timber, the ant-like swarming of men, the railway line, a little puffing engine — fussy and self-assertive. She hated the scene and loved it; it was both hell and a

dimly divined heaven.

She heard a whistle blowing. The little black figures began to swarm in one direction, pouring over the scorched soil, or moving like dots along the threaded girders of the bridge. The work of the day was over. Ramsden would be coming back, tired, fierce, absorbed, to feed upon her patience and her courage, to wallow in it, to suck it up with dry and thirsty lips. Not knowing —— Yes, he did not seem to know.

She saw him coming up the slope, carrying his sun-helmet, his jacket slung over his left shoulder, the lean length of him bent a little. His eyes were on the ground, moodily, as though searching for something that he had lost and did not hope to find. He looked all brown, save his teeth, and the whites of his eyes, and even they had a muddy tinge.

Tired, yes, fiercely tired, and vaguely resentful. That was how he came home to her day by day, a sort of unhappy and morose caricature of the man whom she had married.

She smothered a sigh, and forced aside a sudden sense of depression, conscious while she did it of a moment of impatience. Was she never to be allowed to be irritable or depressed, but always to be ready with the unsoured milk of her kindness?

He came up to her through the patch of soil where she had struggled to make a garden, and had fought with the sun and the drought, and had given up. She had to fight Ramsden's nature without making a war of her own. It was sufficient.

"Your bath's ready, Jack."

He looked at her feet as though he did not see them, but was still in a tense world of strains and stresses.

"Right."

She did not ask him any questions. He had come to be in that state when a man resents questions.

"A perfectly wretched day."

She made a movement in her chair as though preparing herself to meet something, to support a weight, and to do it with an assumption of ease. Sympathy That was the woman's milk, and he drained her of it each day

"I'm sorry. The men — again?"

"Those infernal riveters. A deputation — threats. Well — I

settled them —— If the fools will only get on with the job.

He flung his coat into a chair, and stood looking down over the parched hill-side to the bridge — his bridge.

"Only another month — before we break our contract. It's damnable ——"

She seemed to steady herself with her two hands on the arms of the chair. She too was tired, desperately tired, but Ramsden was never aware of it.

"You'll do it," she said.

She watched his face, gaunt and brown and moody, with its hollow chin, and the bony nose that seemed to be pushing through the skin. There was something in his eyes that always made her courage rise on a surge of compassion.

"If I had a decent second. Moody's a cad. Of course he wants to see me crash ——"

"But you won't," she said in her gentle voice; "go and have your bath. Ching will have dinner ready by the time you have changed."

It is said that women are less just than men, but Grace Ramsden was more than just to her husband. She allowed him his provocations, for Ramsden had had to deal with interferences that would have maddened a much more level-tempered man.

At Saaba they had had epidemics of sickness, strikes, an exasperating mishandling of the transport of the material for the bridge, a sky like a glowing metal dome, flies, mosquitoes, and Heaven knows what. As Ramsden put it: "An offended Jehovah might have emptied all the plagues of Egypt on the place."

And he had to carry on, to meet and overcome all the various interferences, to smother his own rages, to speak reasonably to unceasing fools, to placate the fussiness of people nearer home. His good temper was less potent than his pride.

For the Saaba Bridge was to be his collar of honour or a chain of failure. He had done the lesser things, working steadily upwards towards that big moment in a man's life when all that is in him and all that he has learnt are gathered and thrown into the effort that will make him master. The Saaba Bridge was the edge of Ramsden's plateau; there were other men who would rejoice to see him go slithering down from it.

He had had to fight jealousy, secret opposition, inertia, the various

stupidities. He knew that he had a little clique against him away yonder where men sat in office chairs. He appeared to some men as a haughty and irascible beast, a fellow with insulting silences. Yes, some of them would like to see him down.

At dinner that night he said little. He had his usual self-absorbed stare. The elderly and almost hairless Chinaman moving about the room was not more silent. It was this silence that bore most heavily upon his wife, for she was one of those women with a brown warmth of eyes and hair, a sanguine creature, most happy when she was giving.

And on this night she felt that she must talk or stifle. All day she had been suffering from a spasm of home-sickness, a yearning for that moist greenness that was England, the smell of it. Another month, the twelfth in this yellow brazier of a valley — and then ——!

She felt that she could not bear much more, even for his sake.

"Only another month, Jack."

He gave her a vague glance.

"A month ——?"

"Leave. They must give you leave. Six months. You need it."

"Oh — I'm all right."

She said gently:

"We both need it. Grey skies. One's brain gets scorched. Think of green fields ——"

But it was obvious to her that he could not think of them. He had the eyes of a man who had been staring into the open door of a furnace, and he could see nothing but the glare of it, the glare of his immediate purpose. All else was blotted out.

Afterwards he did not stay with her, but lit a cigar and took the smell of it with him out into the night, as though out there he would find some assuagement for his restlessness. A full moon was up, beautiful or beastly according to your mood, but there was a soreness in Ramsden that resented the moon. He wanted darkness like a cool compress laid upon his soul, utter darkness; he wanted to think, for if your mind must go round and round like an animal in a cage it is better that the cage should be a dark one.

Ramsden's mind was working in a circle, an eternal circle of strains and stresses, thrusts and breaking weights, and all the com-

plicated histology of that bridge of his. There are moments when a man is attacked by leering doubts, and Ramsden, irritable and tired, was like a lamp to the moths of worry.

Had he got everything right? Had he allowed sufficiently for every malignancy of Nature, for wind and water, scour and flood? Was the stuff what it should be? He had had his doubts. He had had to fight the miserable economies of men in chairs, economies that might bring a man's good name crashing, and lose other men their lives.

And Moody?

That big, well-oiled, slimy brute! He did not trust Moody, and yet he had had to trust him.

Craft pride! Could a man be false to it?

He sat down on a rock and smoked, while up yonder his wife, sitting alone in a lighted room, and turning the pages of an old illustrated paper that showed her England, heard footsteps. She paused to listen, with one page half turned, and her eyes on the open doorway. Loneliness sat in her eyes, the loneliness that only a woman knows.

A voice said:

"Excuse me, is your husband at home?"

She was startled. She knew to whom that fat and well-oiled voice belonged, and she saw the dim shape of the man on the stoep.

"Oh, it is you, Mr. Moody. Come in. My husband has gone for a stroll."

He came in, a big fat man, too fat for his age, brown, loose-lipped, self-assured. His round thighs showed through his trousers. He was going bald, and he grew his hair in a rolled and shiny fringe over the nape of his neck. His blue eyes were adventurous and shifty.

"Mr. Ramsden back soon?"

"Yes. Please sit down."

"I wanted to ask him about something."

The light from the hanging lamp fell full upon him as he let his largeness down into a rocking-chair. There were little blue gleams in his eyes; he looked at her as a man of his type looks at most women.

And instantly a queer cunning stirred in her. Her mind grasped

it as her hand might have grasped a knife. The man was false; she knew it, but she did not know how false. But if she knew——

She smiled at him.

"Have a drink——"

She saw those eyes of his react to hers.

"I don't mind——"

"I'll get it——"

"Oh, let me——"

"No — sit still. I know you are tired."

She mixed him his drink and he allowed her to bring it to him, while he looked up at her with an adventurous inquiry in his eyes. Their fingers touched as he took the glass, and rocking himself slightly in the chair he thought:

"Ha, ha, you're a warm creature, and you are beginning to find that man of leather a bit dull."

He smiled and raised the glass to her.

"Good luck! In this confounded climate — one must — you know. Doesn't seem to trouble you, though."

The compliment was slimy, and edged with insolence, but she took it as her first score!

"You don't think so?"

"Hardly. How do you manage it?"

She laughed.

"Cold storage, Mr. Moody."

"Come," said he after a second drink, "I have been Mr. Moody rather a long time. Why not Frank?"

She sat at the table with her chin on her hands.

"Oh, perhaps! Frankness is welcome at times. And I'm — a little bit bored."

"Now?"

His audacity began to swagger.

"No — with life — the bridge — and everything about the bridge."

"Sick of it?"

"Yes."

She played with him awhile, meeting his half-amorous persiflage with masked eyes and a set smile. She let him drift more and more into a splurge of confidences, and when she had him roped she drew the noose to a sudden purpose.

"Tell me about the bridge."

"Does the bridge matter?"

"It does. To me. Can't you understand? It is a sort of nightmare, a curse. I get it everywhere and every way. I want to be done with it."

He looked at her narrowly over his glass.

"What way?"

"I want it finished and done with. Then — we can all of us — get away down to civilization and shops."

He laughed, rocking himself in the chair.

"Live the life, eh? Well — what about this confounded bridge?"

"He — is worrying himself — sick about it. I get all the worries — transferred — I can't stand much more of it. It is all imagination — isn't it? You know."

"What?"

"The bridge is all right? Safe? Some of the nightmare would lift if I felt sure."

She felt his little hot blue eyes fixed on her, and she made herself meet them as she knew he wished her to meet them.

"You are asking me?"

"Some men have plenty of nerve. Inspire confidence. One knows — that when ——"

He smiled at her.

"Yes — I don't get rattled."

"That's what I mean. Do tell me, Frank, as an engineer, what you really think. I know that as an engineer ——"

She was aware of a sudden queer change in him, of a something serious and stable behind the shimmerings of sex. She had appealed to the craftsman, the creator.

"The bridge is all right — absolutely. Don't you worry."

"I'm glad," she said, and hearing her husband's footsteps, rose with a sudden smile at the man in the chair, a smile that left him perched on an illusion.

"Oh, Jack. Mr. Moody's here. I thought you would not be long."

And she left the two men together.

Indifference walks through life so easily, unwounded and unbleeding, for those who care most suffer most. And Grace Ramsden cared. There are certain things about which men will not lie, for

lying about them would be as unnatural as talking away the honour of your wife, and Grace Ramsden felt very sure that Moody had not lied to her.

The bridge was sound, but the scheming and the building of it had strained the silence of her husband. And more than that; it had turned him into a hard-eyed fanatic, a man who has lost the power of sympathy and almost the power of speech. The bridge was in his brain, like a monstrous spider, devouring all other impressions, so that his consciousness had become a thing of steel, of over strained and complaining metal.

There were times during the month that followed when Ramsden's wife asked that the Saaba Bridge might vanish in the night. It was taking her husband and comrade from her, raising a barrier between them.

It was his, and she had been proud of all that was his, but in those last days she began to be jealous, and bitterly afraid. She had to bear with her man's frettings. Almost she felt like a mother trying to be patient with a son in the blind ecstasy of a first unpropitious love affair.

She repeated the same phrases.

"Don't worry, Jack; it will be all right."

His moodiness was exhausting her. She felt herself becoming like him, irritable, suspicious, querulous. There were times when her jealousy threatened to burst into flame, this absurd jealousy inspired by a thing of steel. She could have cried out:

"Damn your bridge. Oh, run away and live with it. I'm nothing, a mere woman."

Nor was this the limit of her fear. There was that night when she could not sleep because of the heat, and getting up from beside him, went out and stood upon the stoep to feel the darkness and the stars, those alien stars, and in looking down towards the Saaba Bridge she had realized that this structure of steel and stone was but symbolical. It symbolized her husband's craft, the passion of the creator.

He was like a man destined to have many love affairs, and this was the first of them. And she——?

She would have to stand aside and watch and wait, and perhaps now and then in the empty pauses he would come back to her, and

expect to find in her the same woman. And she, a woman, starved, denied for months at a time her full free right of self-expression, would be expected to open her arms, to give herself, to make a soft cushion of her starveling love.

"I can't bear it!" was her cry. "I can't bear it."

Yet, with that very cry in her heart she knew that she would have to bear it, for, through all time woman has been a bearer of burdens. She may rebel. She may shake the burden from her shoulders, but bare shoulders do not carry happiness, or that which is more important than happiness, the realization of the inevitableness of our human fate.

She went back to her room and found Ramsden awake.

"What's wrong, Gracie?"

"Oh, the heat. I wanted air."

"You'll find it easier in the cooler season."

As she stood by the bed, a dim figure hardly visible in the darkness, he seemed to divine in her an equally shadowy distress, and a distress that was not physical. He came out of his steel cage for a moment.

"You have stuck it very pluckily, old girl. Only another week or two."

She sat down on the edge of the bed, her whole self softened and reaching out to him.

"Oh, it's my part of the job, Jack! And when it is over——"

Her hand met one of his.

"We'll have a fortnight's haymaking."

"No more than that?"

He was silent for a moment, and she waited eagerly in the warm silence.

"I've been thinking, Gracie — you ought to have a change. There is no reason why you should not take six months in England."

"Alone?"

"It is good for people to be alone sometimes."

"I know. But you——?"

"There's that big irrigation scheme in the Kaarhi Valley. After this — I ought to get it. We shall have to build a monster dam."

She held her breath.

"How long will it take?"

"A three years' job — perhaps."

His voice sounded resonant and eager, and she was conscious of a sudden spasm of despair. A three years' job in this ghastly country, three years of striving and self-absorption, of moods and silences. The Kaarhi Valley Dam would be his second love — while she ——

Her courage failed her. She had to fight back her tears, while her hand gripped him as though she felt him slipping away from her.

"Jack — I'm not so strong as I was. Won't you take me home for six months, and let the Kaarhi Valley go?"

She was aware of tenseness in the silence. His fingers seemed to stiffen.

"My dear girl — I can't."

"Can't."

"It has taken me ten years to push my way; I'm just on the peak. The Kaarhi Valley will be the biggest thing yet. I can't let it go if it comes my way. A man has to go on."

She bowed her head.

"And a woman — too," she thought, "following behind, breathless and hungry. I haven't the strength."

She saw him climbing away from her into the clouds of his strivings and creatings, while she followed like an unnoticed shadow.

Aloud she said:

"It is your life, Jack. I suppose a man has to choose. I'm very proud, of course; I shall always be proud. But don't forget me — quite ——"

He was astonished.

"Why — aren't you here? We are doing things together, aren't we?"

How little he understood her! And she left it at that.

During those last days of the bridge's growth when the last rivets were being hammered, and the masons were pointing the stonework of the piers and facing the embankments with stone, Grace Ramsden sat on the stoep of the bungalow and looked down upon her husband's world. It might have been her world, too, had he been one of those men who have the knack of taking a woman by the

hand.

Married comradeship, that most difficult and blessed of comradeships, can be made so easy, but Ramsden was one of those men to whom the sentiment of life is no more than the unseen oil in the machine's bearings. He took things for granted, and his wife was among the things.

She felt that she had lost him, the real, conscious, comradely self of him, and that nothing would give him back to her. His work had absorbed him. And sometimes there is humiliation as well as heart-ache in a woman's loneliness.

"I'm no more use. And yet — why should I think of being a mere useful thing? A woman has rights."

Rights — yes! But what are rights, elusive personal perquisites which we wring from life and try to believe them ours. For things come of themselves, haphazard, unexpectedly. Plan, and you are deceived. She knew it. She knew, too, that the only wisdom may be in waiting, and that the flower fades in the clutching hand.

His face looked dark and thin, and obscure, when he came back to her one evening. She wondered. A woman does so much wondering. He stood a moment beside her chair before going in to his bath, but he told her nothing. That was his way now.

When he came in to dinner she saw that he was wearing a suit of drill. She observed it, and said nothing, and watched him eat like a worried man in a hurry. She felt on edge, and the meaningless words that passed between them were like sand-grains rubbed into a raw surface.

"Going out again?" she asked at last.

He stared at his glass.

"Got to."

"Nothing wrong?"

"News from up-country. Storms. They work down the river — usually."

"Rains? Flood water?"

He nodded curtly.

"Yes — that's it."

And then he added savagely.

"A month too early, before the time. Just like my luck. Start to build something and you provoke the Devil."

Certainly, the devil of Nature's casual inevitableness was upon the builders of the Saaba Bridge weeks and hours before they had calculated upon her wet interference.

Ramsden was away half the night, and came back morosely tired, with news of rising water, and the work that would have to be done on the morrow, and when Grace Ramsden looked out from her window over the Saaba Valley she saw that the river had spread, and that its tawny width was oozing into other channels.

Ramsden, on the stoep, was looking up with a face of thunder at an ominous sky, and biting hard on his pipe. She joined him there, and his moroseness was like the moroseness of some man before a battle.

"Look at that!"

He pointed with the stem of his pipe.

"All that lumber to be cleared away above flood level before nightfall! And the sky getting angry — already. We should have had another month."

He went down to his labours, teeth showing behind tight lips, and all through the day the river channel swarmed with little black figures clearing away timber dumps and piles of stores, but some hours before darkness fell the storm burst upon them. It seemed to come out of a thundering and purple sky with the suddenness of a mighty bomb exploding, bringing darkness with it and lightning and a roar of wind and rain.

Ramsden's wife had never seen such rain. It steamed and rattled on the iron roof; it blotted out everything. The shutters, blowing loose, creaked and clashed. Outside in that deluge she could picture the yellow Saaba River lifting a tawny head.

Hours passed, and the darkness of the storm became the darkness of the night. No message came to her. The howling valley below would be full of desperate and striving men; the woman would be forgotten.

The Chinaman, looking like a scared and sandy cat, brought in dinner, but she could not touch it. She sat on and on, wondering, vaguely aware of some crisis in her life, their lives.

About midnight, a queer silence fell, comparative silence, though she fancied that she could hear the hoarse voice of the river. The rain and the wind had ceased. A surprising glimmer of moonlight

flickered down.

She was standing in the doorway when she heard voices, a muffled muttering, and the squelching of feet in the soaked soil. She was aware of a stillness within her, a sudden vivid presentiment.

"Gently — gently."

A figure drew into the light, squat and square; she recognized Campbell — the company's doctor.

"Mrs. Ramsden ——"

He stood there wet and ominous, a man bringing some solemn news out of the night.

"There has been an accident," she said.

She saw his glistening sun-helmet move.

"Yes. Your husband. A piece of timber hit him. No — not that. Rather bad — but not that."

Her calmness did not astonish him, for in his life he had met the courage of women.

"He is there?"

"Yes."

She stood back.

"Will you bring him in. I — can help you."

In the night a man's moanings and the doctor's careful words made her understand that the Saaba River had given her husband back to her. It had broken him, and thrown him at her feet. She had gone out for a moment with Dr. Campbell into the dining room, and he had told her the truth.

"A fractured spine, low down — luckily. Yes — he ought to get over it. Too early to say yet — you know — how much will remain."

He had been puzzled by her full, clear eyes.

"Will he be the same?"

"Impossible to say just yet. A long time. Probably not. Much will depend on the nursing."

And then she heard her husband's voice from the inner room.

"Gracie — Gracie — I want you."

She stayed with him all that night, and when the morphia had put him to sleep she sat holding his hand, for he had fallen asleep holding firmly to her hand. A strange happiness possessed her, and mingled with it a profound and gentle compassion. She did not

want to sleep — and when the dawn came, she was still there with her hand in his.

About an hour after dawn he woke, looked at her and sighed. His lips moved; she bent her head to his.

Gracie — dear — don't leave me ——"

A slight frown creased his forehead; his eyes grew suddenly anxious.

"The bridge ——?"

She laid his hand on the bed, pressed it with hers, and getting up went out to find the sun shining. The Saaba River was a great swirling yellow flood, but Ramsden's bridge stood over it like a master.

She smiled, and behind her smile tears quivered. Her exultation was a double one. She went back to the dim room, and kissed him on the forehead.

"Your bridge stands — dear, safe and sure."

He looked at her and muttered something that sounded:

"Like a woman's love."

The Blue Tulip

To thousands of garden enthusiasts the name of Horatio Best must be pressingly familiar.

"Best's Bulbs are the Best Bulbs."

A great advertiser, with a fine declamatory style, he had caught some of the Dutch spirit, and his genial greetings were there upon thousands of breakfast tables with the porridge and the toast. That he had no modesty goes without saying. He was modern and enterprising and sentimental, shouting succulent slush at the great public, crying up the beauties of his tulips and his hyacinths and his lilies as though he were selling Circassian beauties to hot-blooded pashas.

He had a great fondness for pretty pictures in which he cultivated the "child idea."

"No Garden is Complete Without a Child—
or Best's Bulbs."

And having no young children of his own, but only one daughter — Miss Flora Irene Best — aged three-and-twenty, he imported young maidens from Kings Barton, presented them with their tea and a shilling a-piece, and had them photographed among his flowers. For his catalogues he would label the pictures "Innocence" — or "Beautiful Children grow in Beautiful gardens like Best's Beautiful Bulbs."

Now in Mr. Best's nurseries at Kings Barton there was a certain foreman named Robert Maskray, a quiet, reticent, flaxen-haired creature whom Mr. Best always considered a bit of a fool.

As the world wags these days there is no doubt that Robert Maskray had no tail. He was religious with a dreamy and a visionary other-worldliness that moved gently among the flowers, contentedly loving them for themselves and not as children of com-

merce. He read a great deal. He had an austere mouth, and blue eyes that always seemed to be looking beyond the Best scheme of things; but he was reliable and very intelligent — if a little slow.

In his brisk moods, when business was booming, Mr. Best would sometimes show a teasing playfulness in his attitude to Bob Maskray. He was a facetious little man, the sort who in the old days wore a hard felt hat and side whiskers and shaved his long and keen and cunning upper lip.

"How's Clara Butt this year, Bob?"

Maskray would look at his employer with those slow and serene blue eyes of his, and answer with vague solemnity:

"Very well, Mr. Best, thank you."

Maskray had no sense of humour, being one of those men born with a great capacity for reverence and wonder and a feeling for the beautiful. He would have made an ideal gardener in heaven, scattering grape hyacinths over the Elysian fields and spreading over the blessed valleys legions of fragrant narcissi.

"Writing any more poetry, Bob?"

The man's slow and solemn blush was curious.

"No, sir, not exactly."

"Better do me some verses for the adverts, or the catalogue. Nice and pink and juicy, Bob."

Maskray took people seriously.

"Might try, sir."

He did not tell Mr. Best that he had written sonnets to the black hair and eyes and cottage-maid cheeks of Flora Irene, Mr. Best's daughter.

Now a wonderful thing happened to Robert Maskray in the spring of 1924. He had a cottage and a small parcel of ground beyond Kings Barton Bridge, at the back of the Mordaunt almshouses, where he lived alone, with a woman coming in occasionally to cook and wash and scrub. Even during his moments of leisure he was a gardener, experimenting with sweet peas and tulips and narcissi, and trying for new strains in violas and delphiniums.

A small greenhouse, a tenant's fixture, stood at the back of his cottage, and in this spring of 1924 it sheltered, among other things, some pots of Darwin tulips raised from some crossed seed three or four seasons back. These young bulbs had never bloomed. Mask-

ray's interest in them was less fervent than it might have been, simply because his unsophisticated soul had sprouted the wings of a hopeless and romantic love.

These tulip bulbs were sending up their flower stalks, with the fat, green, spear-shaped buds rising a foot or more in the air, and after a day or two's sunlight the greenness began to blush, red, rose and purple.

Maskray had returned after the day's work and had had his tea. He was sad, sad as only an obscure lover can be when the great lady who was not quite so great as to be utterly beyond him, had passed mercilessly through her father's nurseries in search of flowers. Poor Robert had put himself in the way, and had been removed from it with indifferent frankness.

"I haven't come here to waste your time."

Yes, of course he was employed to help in the production of Best's bulbs, and not to select flowers for the daughter.

Egregious Bob! With pocketed hands he wandered out into the garden and into his greenhouse, looking at nothing in particular, for the snub was sore in him. Flowers! What were flowers — after all — when the one particular and heavenly flower ——?

And then his head gave a little attentive jerk. He was looking at one of the pots of tulips, the last pot in the row.

"It can't be," said the voice of the gardener in him. "It can't be. I'm dreaming."

But he wasn't. He frowned, blinked his blue eyes — and went nearer. His face expressed extreme astonishment, for one of the tulip's buds was showing a clear gentian blue.

"Someone's been fooling," was his thought.

But how could anyone fool him with a flower and turn a pot upside down and dip one bloom of the three in a pot of dye? The other flowers were a rich red, and they seemed to enhance the miraculous blueness of that other blossom.

He felt weak at the knees. He picked up the pot and scrutinized the amazing flower, while a voice prattled in him of primary colours and of the impossibility of his having produced a blue tulip by any trick of hybridization. To put it genteelly — "The thing wasn't done." But the blueness of that flower was supremely undeniable. He was not colour-blind.

And then the man's mystic bent betrayed itself. He put the pot back on the staging with a reverent carefulness and went down on his knees.

"God's given it me. Didn't I pray for something? God's sent an answer."

Now, somehow, from that very wonderful moment his blue tulip became mixed up in Robert Maskray's soul with the image of Flora Irene Best. He christened it "Irene," but no one knew. Oh, yes, no one knew. The only blue tulip bulb in the world, and it belonged to him!

Meanwhile there could be no penny press sensation. That precious bulb had to be watched and cherished like something sacred, and another year would elapse before it could bloom a second time. Yes — that would be the proof of its sincerity, a second blueness to prove that it had not played on Robert Maskray some Puckish trick. And then — its progeny, those tiny bulbils, and another two or three years of waiting till the children bloomed and assured him of their likeness to their parent.

In three years' time Robert Maskray would be thirty-seven, and Flora Irene twenty-six. A multitude of things can happen in three years. Husband, children ——

Grievously was he tempted to go to Mr. Horatio Best and to whisper to him:

"I — Robert Maskray — have raised a blue tulip!"

But there was a Quakerish thoroughness in the man that held him back from seeking the immediate effect. He was cautious, conscientious; he wanted to be sure. If he had to wait for his Rachel until he could show to an astonished world a young family of blue-flowered tulips, well — that was nature and the Bible. Maskray had some of the qualities of a fanatic.

Yet the secret dominated him. He went about carrying with him the thought of that precious tulip — dried and dormant and locked away in his old oak desk. He smiled secret smiles; he had the air of a man conscious of divine favour, of being one of the chosen. Even Mr. Horatio Best noticed a change in him; the shy, reticent creature exhaled a puzzling perfume of mingled humility and arrogance.

It was so evident that Mr. Best remarked on it to his daughter.

"Bob Maskray's going soft in the head."

Miss Best was not interested in Robert Maskray. She bloomed like a rose and was as cold as a winter hellebore. Her romance — when admitted — was to be of a suitable dignity. Kings Barton was Kings Barton simply because Mr. Best's bulbs had made it a household word.

"He's a silly creature," she observed. "What has he been doing?"

"Nothing extraordinary."

Mr. Best had a second helping of roast mutton.

"Love or religious mania or something. He has got a queer smile these days, and talks like the Bible. Why, he couldn't let me by the common white lilies without quoting scripture."

" 'Solomon in all his glory?' "

"Precisely so," said her father. "Begins to make you wonder when one of your foremen starts quoting scripture."

Miss Best thought it a bad sign.

"I'd sack him. Remember Bates — who used to preach on Sundays?"

"Yes," said her father grimly; "and I caught him on the Saturday going forth with his pockets full of lilium auratum."

But Robert Maskray was not sacked. There was nothing that he could be reproached with, and a queer, seraphic, secret smile cannot be charged as a sin. He continued to worship from afar, as though he had planted Flora Irene in a pot in his greenhouse and was waiting for the great consummation. But the dear fool had some worldly wisdom.

He fitted a second and more complex lock to the door of his greenhouse, and two weeks before the miraculous bulb's annunciation was due he tacked a white calico screen round the lower part of the glazed walls. No prying eyes were to peep. But Robert Maskray and his greenhouse were of no interest to Kings Barton.

That year the blue tulip flowered true. And when the gentian blue cup had opened, Maskray carried the pot up to the little attic in his cottage, and placed it on a stool by the window. He kept the attic door locked.

Later his joy grew exultant, for the blue tulip bulb gave him two tiny bulbils.

Three years passed. Miss Best was still Miss Best, though no less

than five possible partners had tried to persuade her to attempt matrimony. Meanwhile Best's Bulbs were not booming like the May-bugs; an unexplainable dullness had descended upon Mr. Best's business; and thin lipped — he pointed an accusing finger at Holland.

"Those Dutchmen!"

It occurred to him on occasions that his daughter should be thinking of getting married. Some comfortable young fellow with money to put into the business; but Flora Irene's fastidiousness seemed to increase as her father's appeals to the bulb-buying public grew more urgent and flamboyant.

No — the man she married was to be able to build a nice, new arty house on Monk's Hill, and provide her with a solid, four-seater touring car. None of your hip baths for two with a dicky not fit for a dog to ride in.

Robert Maskray, exercising a Biblical patience, became more and more obsessed by his dream, developing — simple soul though he was — a divinely inspired slyness. Flora Irene was still Flora Irene, and Best's Bulbs were not as marketable as they had been.

But — he — Robert Maskray — was the possessor of a blue tulip, a miraculous flower, a living talisman with which to conjure love and fortune. He would sit in his little garden and dream. He would see himself unveiling this blue prodigy before the eyes of the amazed father, and the daughter — grown suddenly and exquisitely melting — throwing her arms about his neck. "Oh, wonderful Robert!"

The blue tulip — the only blue tulip in the world, with the whole horticultural community speechless, and nurserymen and bulb growers scrambling for one small child of it! How much would each bulb be worth? Hundreds of pounds — perhaps. And the blue Irene would be the cynosure, his peerless queen.

He sat and exulted.

For now he had three bulbs all ripe to flower, and a dozen or so bulbils of different sizes, and he could think of seed.

Yes, the great day of revelation was near. He would wait until all three flowering bulbs had proved their purity, and then he would go to Mr. Horatio Best and invite him to come and look at a novelty that waited in his greenhouse. Yes, he meant to be a little mysterious about it — dramatic. Why should he not ask Mr. Best

to bring his daughter?

The wonderful day arrived. It was sunny, as it should be, and Robert Maskray, making a sedate entry into the nursery office, asked for Mr. Horatio. Shown in by a girl clerk, he found Mr. Best looking rather thin and pinched about the upper lip.

His glance was irritable.

"What d'you want, Bob?"

Maskray seethed with the delicious secret.

"I have a flower I should like you to see."

"Oh — what sort?"

"Tulip. Might interest you, sir."

"Busy. Bring a bloom in.

"Too precious to cut, sir."

"Oh, all right——"

He gave a push to his chair, but the foreman checked such useless haste.

"Not in the nursery, sir; but in my greenhouse. Perhaps you will come down and drink a cup of tea with me, sir, and look at the flower. It's worth looking at, though I did raise it."

Mr. Best stared. He seemed suspicious.

"Rather busy, Bob. But might manage it."

He was aware of a seraphic smile.

"And perhaps Miss Best would come too. I would be honoured. I have christened the flower Irene, sir. No impertinence intended."

Mr. Best stared still harder, and on going home to lunch informed his daughter of Robert Maskray's apparent madness.

"Balmy, my dear! Raised some sort of tulip, and called it 'Irene.' Wants me to go and have tea and look at it. You too."

"Me!" said Miss Best sharply.

"Yes — you."

"I have something better to do," said the lady. "Silly fool! A fool like that — with calf's eyes."

About five o'clock Mr. Best strolled down over Kings Barton Bridge and, turning past the almshouses, came to Robert Maskray's cottage. The dreamer had arrived there half-an-hour before him, having stopped to buy a bag of fancy cakes at Bowden's just above the bridge.

The tea-table had been laid in the morning, with a pink-and-white

check cloth and Robert's best china, and there were flowers — white narcissi in an old blue vase. The queen should have her cakes and flowers. Mr. Best came to the cottage door and knocked, and Maskray, peering through the window, saw that Mr. Horatio was alone. His dream face fell a little.

"Come in, sir. Sorry Miss Irene——"

"Got a bun-party or something," said the father, who seemed gruff and worried.

He was fidgety and absent all through the meal. A silly business this, sitting down with a foreman at a tea-table. And flowers and fancy cakes! Not for him obviously! Now what had this fool of a fellow got in his bonnet?

"What about this thing of yours, Bob?"

Maskray rose with the air of a high priest about to unveil sacred mysteries.

"In the greenhouse, sir. If you will come through into the garden."

When Mr. Best saw those three tulips with their gentian blue cups open to the sunlight he did not believe them to be what they appeared to be. It was impossible. This fool Maskray was playing some silly trick on him. The flowers could not be real.

"Nice imitation, Bob. Never tried dyeing flowers before. Or they're not paper, are they?"

Maskray flushed.

"Do you think I'm that sort of man, Mr. Best? I'm showing you a blue tulip, the first blue tulip——"

Mr. Best put out a sudden hand towards one of the posts; but Maskray, with a quick eagerness that was almost mistrustful, interposed, and taking a pot in his hands, held the flower within a foot of Mr. Horatio's face.

"Real, sir. Gives you a shock, doesn't it? It gave me one the first time I saw it four years ago."

Mr. Best seemed to be squinting down his predacious nose.

"By Jove!" he said; and then: "Where the devil did you get——"

"Came in a lot, sir, I bought from De Vries. No; it didn't come from your nursery."

"A sport. But does it come true?"

"It has flowered true four years — and the other two in bloom were bulbils from it."

The bulb merchant stood amazedly yet intelligently silent. His little eyes glimmered. He stroked his long upper lip.

"How many of them have you, Bob?"

"These three full-sized bulbs and a dozen or so youngsters. I wanted to be sure, sir, and to work up a small stock."

"By Jove!" said Mr. Best in a whisper, and again, "By Jove!"

And suddenly their eyes met. Those of the bulb merchant were watchful, glinting with business; Maskray's seemed to be looking through Mr. Best at something beyond him.

"Say, Bob, this is going to be the sensation of the century. What about it?"

He saw Maskray smile.

"I take these bulbs up to my bedroom at night——"

"Jove, man! They're more valuable than bullion."

"I know. Is it — is it — a question of business between us, sir?"

"Well — what's your idea?" said the cautious one.

"I'm in love with your daughter," said Muskray with abrupt quietness. "I have been in love with her for years."

Another shock! Mr. Best sat down on the greenhouse staging, half off and half on a box of mustard and cress.

"Well — I'm ——!"

But he did not damn himself. The possibilities of the situation were too extraordinary. He stared at one of the blue tulips.

"Began as a working-man myself," he said; and then, "What's the exact idea, Robert?"

Maskray, standing with one of the precious pots in his hand, and with a queer, luminous shine on his face, seemed to speak to the blue tulip.

"I called it 'Irene,' the first blue tulip. Yet it isn't so wonderful as she is. I'm a plain man, but there's nothing I wouldn't do to make her happy. Money — oh — yes! I'd want her to live as she has always lived. I'm not a man for mere money, Mr. Best, but there is money in this flower — and I want the gold to throw at your daughter's feet."

Mr. Best observed his foreman's transfigured face. Talk about miracles! And all this devotion prayerfully on its knees before Flora Irene! Miss Best might be his daughter, but Mr. Horatio knew his daughter's limitations. Wonderful! Was she? Poor Robert! But,

chiefly, he was concerned with the business proposition, for he had no doubt at all that Maskray had opened a floral gold-mine.

"A partnership, Bob. Is that your idea?"

"In a way, sir, on the understanding ——"

"That you marry my daughter? But, come, come, she has to be considered."

Maskray answered with quiet humility:

"Of course, sir. I'm no more than a plain man at her feet. I have got to work and fit myself, and all I ask is that I may have my chance with her."

He raised his head and smiled suddenly.

"But the Maskray who raised the blue tulip. Maskray of Best and Maskray. Not plain Bob."

Mr. Horatio understood him.

"Ah — that's it. There's a fortune in that flowerpot. By Jove, the sensation, the splash! Saved any money, Robert?"

"About three hundred pounds."

"Well — well, not so bad. Supposing you were to bring your money and the tulip into the business, and take a third share. We could talk about the details later."

Maskray looked at his tulip.

"Something comes before that, sir. I want to be allowed to speak to Miss Irene, to tell her what's in my heart. I want to show her her tulip. Maybe — she'll be willing to let me hope."

Mr. Best concealed a business man's impatience. Hang it all, was not business good enough without importing a young woman into it?

"Quite so, Robert, quite so. Supposing I give my daughter a hint. And supposing you come up this evening — and bring that flower."

Robert Maskray's face seemed to see heaven opened.

"Thank you, sir. Tell her I'm a plain man and know it; but, as sure as God has given me this flower, I'll try to be worthy of her."

Mr. Horatio shook hands with Maskray and hurried home. Diplomacy — yes, diplomacy was needed, for his daughter was a young woman who could go off like a Chinese cracker. Obviously she must be persuaded to smile, even if the smile were only temporary. The thing was to get control of that tulip. Mr. Best had foresight and a quick sense of smell. The horticultural sensation of

the century! What a coup! His brain seethed with the possibilities of it.

He found his daughter at home, amusing herself with a cross word puzzle.

"My dear, I have had a surprise, the surprise of my life."

He declaimed, and she listened with a perfectly expressionless yet attentive face. So, fool Bob Maskray — a working man — was in love with her! No new news that. And he was hoping to climb to her favour like a Jack-of-the-Beanstalk up the stem of a monstrous tulip!

She kept a quiet face, but inwardly she raged, for it so happened that on this very day life had hurt her and humiliated her, and she was no gentle creature. Her raw young spirit raged to pass on the pain.

"So he's coming up?"

"Yes, my dear. Now, sentiment apart, it's a business proposition."

"Quite so," said she. "I'll see him."

When the critical hour and Robert Maskray and his tulip arrived, Mr. Horatio withdrew himself to the dining-room and lit a cigar and straddled in front of the fire. Rum business this! But then — Flora Irene should be able to handle it successfully.

But — good heavens — what was that? A smashing of glass? Investigation was needed, and when Mr. Best opened the drawing-room door he beheld an open window, and his daughter standing by the sofa and laughing hysterically.

"My dear ——"

He went to the window, and pulling it down, found one of the big panes smashed.

"How — who ——? Where's Maskray?"

Her laughter frightened him.

"He — oh, he went out of the window after I had thrown his tulip — pot and all — through the glass."

Mr. Best's upper lip quivered. He stared for a moment, and then rushed to the door and, going out into the garden, shouted to Robert Maskray; but no one answered him. On the path in front of the drawing-room window he was able to discover a few broken pieces of pot.

"Oh — women, women!"

He went in again, snatched a hat, and hurried down the road in the direction of Kings Barton. It took him a quarter of an hour to reach Maskray's cottage, and he calculated that the tulip grower could not have been very far ahead of him. There was a light in the cottage. He knocked.

"Who's that?" said a voice.

Mr. Best tried the door and it opened to him, but he paused on the threshold of Maskray's room, for Robert Maskray was sitting all hunched up on a Windsor chair in front of the fire with a coal shovel in his hand. He was staring at the fire.

"Bob," said Mr. Horatio softly, but suddenly afraid.

Maskray did not turn his head, but continued to stare at the fire.

"The tulips?"

"I have burnt them," said the man.

And then he added:

"God gave it me. 'Twas a beautiful thing, and I was for selling the soul of a flower. But the Devil spoke the word. Yes, I have burnt the lot."

A Red Blind

IT WAS A WINDOW WITH A RED BLIND.

Anthony Vance passed it twice a day: at 7.30 in the morning and at 8.30 at night. Always there was light burning behind the red blind, because it was December when Vance began to travel to and fro from Rickmansworth, and his morning train was early and his evening train late. He worked some twelve hours a day — a young man creating his own opportunities and collecting a career. He was a departmental manager with the world-renowned firm of Killick & Paul.

His parents had christened him Anthony Dawn Vance. Inevitably at school he had been known as Advance, or more vulgarly as Hustle. Nicknames are not always fair to the victim; Vance was not all hustle.

He had imagination, curiosity, a sense of colour. Probably that was why he noticed the red window and continued to notice it — an unknown window in an unknown street. It was one of many windows at the back of an ugly row of flat-faced houses of a yellowish blackness. It belonged to the third floor. It had the bare branches of a black old poplar tree in front of it, and like a miniature sunset or dawn it outlined the spreading twigs.

The railway line passed through a deepish cutting below this row of houses. Vance was rather vague as to the neighbourhood; it might be Chalk Farm or Camden Town, but certainly it would be shabby and semi-respectable, a neighbourhood that would make you wonder who lived there and how and why.

But the red window continued to interest him; in fact his interest in it increased. It set him speculating as to the human contents of the room to which it belonged. Was the window male or female or both? He had a feeling that it was feminine. And what sort of woman would occupy such a room? A clerk, or typist, or shop-girl or waitress? His tendencies were towards youthfulness. It was just

speculation, for Vance was not exactly a sentimentalist; Killick & Paul demanded a fierce efficiency, not sentimentalism. And there were occasions when he would laugh at his speculations, and reflect that probably the red blind veiled a very frowsy person, the kind of stout lady you saw serving in a greengrocer's shop, and looking like a cold and over-ripe plum on the edge of bursting its integument.

In Vance, speculation tended to become active. In his Bloomsbury days when he had occupied a very top-floor bed sitting-room, and had lunched at Messrs. Lyons' or with the Aerated Bread Company, on six-pence, he had been an inveterate explorer. The red window was like a solitary light seen in strange, wild country after dark. It occurred to him that it would be quite amusing to hunt up that unknown house in an unknown street. It would not be altogether easy. The red blind was visible only from the railway line.

It happened that towards Christmas, life became so strenuous at Killick & Paul's that Vance, who courted strenuosities and their possibilities, decided to sleep in town for a week. He put up at a little private hotel not far from Russell Square. And with a week-end arriving, and providing him with a portion of Saturday and the whole of Sunday to do as he chose with, he thought of the red window. The locating of it suggested the solving of a sort of Chinese puzzle. There was much of the boy in Anthony Vance.

He had looked up possible streets in a large-scale section map of London, and had jotted down the names of several that ran parallel to the railway. He chose Camden Town. He had scribbled the names of these streets on the back of an envelope.

He set out. It was rather foggy, and all that shabby neighbourhood grew more dim and grey; it seemed to fade away into the dusk. It was endless, and Vance got lost. His explorations had never carried him into these parts, and as the dusk changed to a darkness that was smudged with the lights of lamps and windows, he knew himself much lost.

He stopped a postman, and plumped for one of his hypothetical addresses.

"Excuse me, do you know Endover Street?"

"Yes. First on left, and take the second to the right."

"Thanks."

Vance found Endover Street, only to realize that it could not

contain that row of houses with the red window. Endover Street offered him nothing but squat little semi-detached villas. It seemed to specialize in prowling cats.

He stopped a baker's boy who was out late trundling a hand-cart.

"D'you know Mordant Street?"

The boy did.

"Go along 'ere. Cut through a sort o' passage between a pub and a row of 'ouses, and you'll be in Mordant Street."

"Runs beside the railway line, doesn't it?"

"Can't say. But that's the way to Mordant Street."

Vance found the passage between the public-house and the row of houses. The pub had steaming windows, and the mouth of the passage was denied to wheeled traffic by a couple of iron posts resembling cannon with their breeches let into the ground. The passage passed the entrance to a builder's yard, where two dark figures were bending over the engine of a lorry. Mordant Street displayed itself in the darkness as two rows of highish houses set back behind dingy little gardens. The houses had semi-basements and flights of steps going up to the front doors.

Vance paused at the end of Mordant Street. The row of houses on the left had the appearance of being the very row of houses he was in search of. They were three stories high, and as far as he could judge the brickwork was of the same sooty yellowness. And then he heard a train pass in the cutting at the back of the row, and the rumble of its wheels seemed to applaud the conviction that Mordant Street held the window with the red blind.

He strolled on. The house with the red window would be somewhere in the centre of the row, and he saw the numbers of the houses painted upon the glass lights above the doors. Seventeen, nineteen, twenty-one. The red window was on the side of the odd numbers.

He paused outside the iron gate of No. 21. Mordant Street was as melancholy and depressing a street as you could wish for in order to stress a hideous utilitarianism, yet it was like hundreds of other streets, hiding its shabby secrets behind dingy lace curtains. The houses seemed to peer at each other suspiciously across the roadway. Their windows looked short-sighted and dim. A fire was burning in the basement of No. 21; the blind was up, and Vance could see the

white leg and corner of a kitchen table.

He was leaning on the iron gate, thinking that Mordant Street was no very glorious discovery, when the front door opened and closed and a woman came down the steps. She carried a little attaché case; she moved with the deliberate swiftness of a person who had a purpose in life; also, her movements were youthful. She caught Vance in the act of withdrawing from the gate.

She spoke to him.

"Don't hang about here. I suppose you are one of them. If you want to see him, go up."

Astonishing salutation! But delivered with a brusqueness and a touch of contempt, and Vance raised his hat.

"Thank you. Very good of you——"

But she left him standing there. Obviously, she had business of her own, and no particular use for the loafing male. Her face, with its firm chin and straight nose had a crispness. And Vance stood possessed of an extraordinary situation. She had supposed that he was "one of them"; but who were "them"? And if he wanted to see "him," he was to go up, and not loaf outside the gate.

But who was "him"? and what was "him's" mysterious business in life? and was he not becoming rather ungrammatical with his thems and his hims? Intriguing situation! But why not accept it; why not seize it? Was it possible that "he" occupied the room with the red blind? The adventure was becoming actual; it was not to be resisted.

Then Vance had an idea. Of course! "He"—was a bookie, and people came to 21 Mordant Street to make their bets. Yes; that was the most probable explanation.

The girl's footsteps had died away, and Vance went up the path, and climbed the steps. Should he ring, or go straight in? He decided to ring.

He heard shuffling footsteps. The door was opened six inches by a short, stout, elderly woman. She did not ask any questions. She eyed the dim, masculine figure on the doorstep with a kind of passive and stolid hostility.

"Is—he—in?"

The woman stood back and opened the door, and Vance walked into the narrow hall where a gas jet, turned low, showed him the

foot of the stairs covered with brown linoleum.

"May I go up?"

"They always do."

"My first visit. Which floor?"

"Top-floor back."

"Thank you."

He started to climb the stairs. He was very much aware of the strangeness of those stairs, and of the unexpectedness of the whole affair. Surely it was both an impudent and imprudent adventure. Danger? No, he did not think there was any danger in his climbing of those unknown stairs. The girl would not have spoken to him as she had done; she had struck him as being a very practical young person, and not in the least sinister.

He arrived on the top-floor landing; it was in semi-darkness; he saw a line of light at the bottom of a door, the door of the third-floor back. Obviously "he" was in there, and for a moment Vance's boyish cheek failed him. He was on the edge of bolting down the stairs and out into the street. But, hang it, was he going to funk at the last moment? Did he not flatter himself that in business he could call any man's bluff.

He knocked at the door. A clear, sharp voice answered from within. It was one of those voices that suggest the bugle, a metallic, ringing quality.

"Come in."

Vance opened the door, and found himself looking at a red blind. Extraordinary linking up of circumstances! So this was the very room whose window he had looked at so often. He saw a narrow bed with a red coverlet, tucked away in a far corner, a round table, a chest of drawers. There were books and writing materials on the table. But for the moment the occupant of the room was screened by the open door, and he did not come into view until Vance stepped into the room.

He stared.

"I beg your pardon. I was told to come up."

He stood holding the handle of the door, and looking down at the man in the arm-chair beside the fire. This man had an old grey rug over his knees; he was dressed in dark-blue dressing-gown and flannel shirt. And he was as unexpected as the whole absurd adven-

ture, though there was nothing absurd about the figure by the fire. On the contrary "he" looked a rather formidable person, with his head of red hair going grey, and the fierceness of his striking face. His eyes were of an extraordinary light-blueness, rather like brittle ice. He had a disconcerting way of staring.

"Quite right. Shut the door. Sit down."

"He" was even more abrupt than the girl, and Vance obeyed him rather like a boy obeying a schoolmaster. He put his hat on the table. He was wondering what the devil to say.

"You'll excuse me, sir — but this is a rather singular occasion."

It was. And so was the remark; but to Vance's surprise "he" appeared to regard the statement as natural, inevitable. The harsh and handsome face emitted a little gleam of self-conscious complacency.

"Other people have made that remark. The prophet is not quite without honor. Your name?"

"My name is Vance."

"He" allowed himself a transient, grim smile.

"Advance! Yet another omen. Even a great man must have his joke."

"Quite so," said Vance, wondering whether the man in the chair was a madman, or a sort of self-made prophet, or both.

He felt that the old man in the chair had him at a disadvantage. for "he" now knew his visitor's name and could assume some reason for the visit, whereas Vance was like a small boy caught trespassing Apparently "he" was accustomed to visitors calling upon him, for he had shown no surprise when Vance — another stranger — had walked into his room. Vance used his eyes, and tried guile. He noticed what appeared to be a pile of manuscript lying on the table.

"May I ask you a favour, sir? I should like your autograph."

The angry blue eyes observed him.

"Autographs! Are you a collector of autographs? Is that the only reason ——?"

"Not at all, sir. But I should value ——"

He produced a fountain-pen and a note-book and, getting up, offered them to the man in the arm-chair. And with complete solemnity the man in the chair proceeded to sign his name on a blank page of Vance's note-book. He signed it with a flourish, and

with *éclat:*

"Hector March."

He handed the pen and the book back to Vance with the air of a great man accustomed to the conferring of such favours.

"Some day, Mr. Vance, I think that signature will possess some significance."

Vance hurried to agree.

"Inevitably so, sir."

But who the devil was Hector March? Was he anybody; had he been anybody? Obviously Mr. Hector March himself had no doubts upon the matter. He took himself with very great seriousness. He was not exactly humble.

Vance put his pen and note-book away, and wondered what the next move was to be. Possibly he may have appeared a little embarrassed, but his embarrassment suited the occasion. Hector March was not unaccustomed to finding embarrassment in his visitors. Apparently he accepted it as a natural tribute.

He said:

"So, you are one of my disciples, Mr. Vance."

Vance, caught unawares, sustained the illusion.

"Obviously, sir. That is to say — I was powerfully attracted. I had to come."

Mr. March replied with a stately and consenting movement of his arrogant head.

"I understand. The light shines — even from this upper chamber. People come to me from the ends of the earth. They carry away my message."

Vance, thinking of the red blind, could say truthfully that he had been conscious of Mr. March's light for quite a long time. He was reminded of the eastern sages, and of the words of wisdom spoken to their disciples. No doubt this red-headed old man would present him with words of wisdom, and having expressed his gratitude he would be able to get up and go.

"If I might say so, sir — I should like to carry away a message."

Mr. March's blue eyes fixed him.

"Ah, yes, a message. My message is always the same. Nearly two thousand years ago a man preached the religion of love. Then — I — came to preach the religion of hate. Hate alone, young man, can

cleanse and renew the world."

So that was it! And Vance decided that he was ready to go, but he was not to get away so easily. The prophet of hate was a multitudinous talker; he welcomed an audience, even an audience of one; and for another half an hour Vance sat there and was made to feel like a boy listening to a fanatical sermon.

Mr. March breathed upon him like a dragon of wrath. His angry blue eyes glared. He had an extraordinary flow of language. He erupted hate as a volcano spews lava.

But at the end of half an hour Vance did manage to leave his chair, and edge gradually towards the door.

"I assure you, sir, it has been a great privilege to listen ——"

"Come again, Mr. Vance, come again. Youth is ripe soil. I sow the seed."

"You do, sir. Good night, sir," and Vance escaped down the stairs and out into the dingy dimness of Mordant Street.

What a man! What an adventure! So the red blind had veiled a furious old herald of revolution. And Vance wanted to laugh. He did laugh, but his laughter had a raw edge to it. He felt that he had been in the presence of something that was evil.

He remembered the girl. What was her share in the business? Was she the old red dragon's daughter?

Anthony Vance's curiosity was increased; it became humanized. On the Sunday morning he went to his club, and searched for the name of Hector March in "Who's Who" and in a biographical dictionary. It was possible that March had been a somebody in his day, and had lived on as a derelict, back-street celebrity, but Vance did not find the name of March in "Who's Who."

Vance lunched at his club. On entering the dining-room he saw old Vansittart, one of the club worthies, sitting at a window table, and Vance joined him. Vansittart knew everybody or about everybody who was or had been, and he liked to talk. Vance opened the subject.

"I've come across a queer person, a sort of second edition of Karl Marx. Came across him quite by chance. I have been looking up his name, but I can't find it anywhere."

Vance was a very young and new member, but he was what is called a nice lad, bright but not too obviously opinionated, and old

Vansittart smiled upon him.

"A back number?"

"Very much a front number, sir, in his own estimation. Has a message for civilization. Writes, too — I should imagine."

"What's his name?"

"March, Hector March."

Old Vansittart's wrinkled face seemed to sharpen.

"March? — March? Not — the — March?"

"That's all I know, sir. He has a red head growing grey, and he talks red ruin."

"Good Lord, man, don't tell me you have unearthed Hector March? Why — that was one of the sensations of the political world some thirty years ago. The sudden and utter disappearance of March."

"I have never heard about it. May I know?"

"March was one of those comet-like persons who flash out of nowhere. He could talk; he had a wonderful gift of the gab, and an immense swelled head. He appeared first in the Midlands. He carried a fiery cross. He had a very red tail. He lost his first two contests; but at the third attempt he was elected for some manufacturing constituency.

"For some years he was a sort of infant terror in the 'House,' a red-headed, irrepressible Jack-in-the-box. He was brilliant. Obviously he thought himself the coming man on the side of what he called progress. He talked hate. He was the sort of man who would shed tears while proposing to string every little tradesman to a lamp-post. And then he disappeared, vanished like a red-hot shot dropped into the sea."

"Disappeared? But members of Parliament don't disappear."

"March did. It was a mystery. He vanished. Even his constituents did not know what had become of him. Not that anyone was vastly grieved. His hymn of hate had began to be a little boring. We English are not good haters. His career went plop. He was turned out like a gas jet."

"But surely ——?"

"There was gossip. Of course, the obvious explanation was that March had to disappear. There was some very good reason for it."

"A scandal?"

"Oh, more than a mere scandal. I've heard that his private life was a bit ragged. Probably — something — happened. But how the devil did you come across him? He was supposed to be dead and forgotten."

Vance did not tell the whole tale.

"Just chance. I met him through a mutual acquaintance. He lives in the top-floor back room of a house in a seedy street. He just sits in a chair and spouts universal hatred. There seems to be people who go to listen to him. But — by Jove ——"

A sudden idea had come to him. He remembered the grey rug covering March's knees, and that March had sat there rather like a man who had lost the power of movement.

"By Jove — that's it. I believe he is paralyzed. He can't walk."

"Ah!" said old Vansittart with a look of interest and of shrewdness; "that rather tallies with the tale that was told. March broke himself over — oh — well — you can guess. And he has nothing left but a tongue."

Vance smoked his Sunday cigar alone in a corner of the reading-room. He wanted to think over Vansittart's recollections. They were like the settings of a strange picture; they made it more vividly sinister and singular, the live portrait of that immense old egotist with his angry eyes and his palsied legs, frothing out hatred in that back-street room. Helpless, forgotten, abandoned, he retained nothing but hatred and a poisonous tongue.

But the girl? Was she the daughter? And how did March live? Did he live on the girl's earnings? Was he both prophet and parasite? — for so many prophets have condescended to exist as parasites.

Vance's interest deepened and broadened.

He wanted to find out about that girl with her crisp, cold face, and her air of deliberate detachment.

Recalling approximately the time when she had descended upon him with her little attaché case Vance supposed that he might count upon her appearing in Mordant Street at much the same hour. He decided to try and shadow her. He wanted to complete his human cross-word puzzle. He was somewhat his own master at Killick & Paul's, and late on the Monday afternoon he took a taxi to Camden Town.

Dusk was falling when he entered Mordant Street, the same dim,

foggy dusk. He walked past No. 21, and decided to loiter by the builder's yard at the end of the passage. From there he would just be able to distinguish anyone's emergence from No. 21.

He had waited less than ten minutes when he saw a figure detach itself from the door of No. 21. It descended the steps, and on leaving the gate turned towards him. Vance lounged against the wall with his hat pulled down and his overcoat collar turned up. The girl went past him as though he were part of the wall.

He followed, but with circumspection. She led him through various unknown streets; she walked fast; her goal was Mornington Crescent tube station. Vance managed to get sufficiently near to see her take a twopenny ticket from the automatic machine. He had to hurry. He got into the lift with her, and into the same coach; she appeared quite unaware of him as her shadow. She left the train at Leicester Square, and he followed her out into the street.

Three minutes later he had pursued her to the back entrance of the "Pantheon." She disappeared, and he could draw his own conclusions. In all probability she was employed at the Pantheon as a waitress, or book-keeper, or cloak-room attendant.

Vance strolled on. In the tube lift he had been able to observe the girl's face. It attracted him. It had aloofness, and pride. She was not the sort of girl to whom you applied the word "pretty." She looked hard with that modern, feminine hardness; she had a sleek, firm skin; her chin and lips were crisp and decided. But there was a something in her eyes, a sense of mystery behind the mask.

Vance decided to dine at the Pantheon. It was a popular restaurant, but not too much so. It was patronized by people who had a margin, and did not go grey over the spending of an unexpected sixpence. You might dress, or you might not. Vance turned in and reserved a table, and then walked on to his club to kill time until half-past seven.

Now — if his luck continued? It did continue. The Pantheon had three big rooms, and Vance found that a table had been reserved in a corner of the central room. He sat down with his back to the wall, and looked about him. The service was feminine, with a *maître d'hôtel* and a wine waiter in addition. Two girls approached Vance's table. One of them wore a red rosette with red letters in the centre: H. W. The head waitress was March's supposed

daughter.

It was she who handed Vance the menu. She was polite, detached yet attentive.

"What will you take, sir. Grape fruit? Yes. Thick or clear soup?"

She wrote down the dishes, and left the slip with the other waitress.

"Do you wish for the wine list, sir?"

"Please."

"I'll send the wine waiter to you."

Obviously she was supremely efficient. She served, because it was her job, and she did not appear to despise it. She did not suggest a condescending superiority. She was natural and courteous and cold. She did not smile. She kept her dignity.

During the meal Vance watched her. It seemed to him that she held herself very much apart from the other girls; in her free moments she stood aloof, surveying the room. Almost she had an air of being above all these prosperous people who did nothing but eat and drink and chatter; her very slimness and her calm pallor suggested asceticism; she saw so much food.

Vance took to dining at the Pantheon every evening. He arranged to have the same table reserved. And every evening March's daughter went through the same ritual; she wrote down his dishes; she remained impersonal and polite.

"Soup to-night, sir?"

That was the only indication that she gave that she recognized him as a regular patron.

But he began to dare to give her a little bow and to wish her good evening. His homage, such as it was, took care to be frigid and formal. She was the gentlewoman. If the average man should dare to assume her to be as silly as his sex playfulness he would be withered, frozen.

For Vance had a feeling that this girl had her own Godiva ride through life, and that she kept her scorn for Peeping Toms. She had something to bear, something to suffer. Her pale slimness was like a stalk carrying the serenity of a voiceless scorn. In her way she had an uniqueness.

He waited. He dined and was persistently courteous and careful. If the ice of her aloofness was to be broken it would have to be

done delicately.

But how?

The easy thing made no appeal to such a man as Vance. He might be a merchant, but he valued some of the goods that cannot be had for money. He was the hunter and he had the hunter's guile. He decided that the time was ripe for a second visit to the prophet of red ruin; he might meet the daughter and he might not. Diplomacy has its appeal.

So No. 21 Mordant Street saw him again. He arrived there at about three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. The same glum, square person opened the door.

"Is Mr. March in?"

"Oh, yes; he's always in."

Said Vance, drawing a bow at a venture:

"It's rather hard — to be paralysed. Is Miss March in?"

"No."

Vance climbed the stairs, having made sure of two pieces of information. He found the prophet sitting in the same chair. He looked older, feebler, but his blue eyes still glared. He welcomed his audience.

"Ha! So you've come again. And you are English, young man. That's unusual."

Vance led the conversation in a particular direction.

"The English are slow to move, sir."

"Fools, Mr. Vance; fools. Sentimental fools. A prophet is not without honor — save ——"

"Exactly, sir. But then there are people who believe in you. Your daughter must believe in you."

And suddenly he saw those harsh blue eyes flare up.

"Children, sir! I have suffered indescribable things from my children. Egotists, individualists, English. I have cast them off. Kitty — alone — has respect, reverence."

"Had you many children, sir?"

"Seven. But we are not speaking of children. And what is your work, young man?"

Vance was not quite candid.

"I work in a big business."

"Ha, big business! What I call big blackguardism. One of the

exploited, a black ant."

Vance could not resist a sly question.

"Yes, black ants, if you like. But granting the ant idea, your scheme, sir, would just change our colour, and make us red ants instead of black."

Mr. March's fingers gripped the folds of the grey rug covering his knees; he had a way of clawing at that grey rug when he was excited. Vance's question had excited him, and he was about to reply to it when the door opened and the daughter entered. She was wearing a black hat and a coat edged with some cheap fur.

Vance stood up. He made a little stiff movement; he managed to smile.

She stared at him. Her eyes were like two dark points. He felt transfixed. She said nothing.

Her father, as ever, absorbed in his own affairs, saw nothing.

"Catherine — this is Mr. Vance — one of my disciples."

There was a pause, a kind of brittleness in the air, and then Vance, with a faintly smiling assumption of serenity, picked up his hat and made for the door.

"Time I was going, sir. Perhaps — another day. We will continue the argument."

He found himself on the stairs, only to realize that Kitty March was following him. He was just a little scared of Kitty March. He paused in the hall with his hand on the door-handle.

"Remarkable man, your father."

She said not a word, and he opened the door and was about to close it when she made it plain that she too was coming out. And Vance walked to the little iron gate and waited. He knew that she intended him to wait, and that if he did not wait she would claim him as a coward.

She stood there looking straight into his face.

"What's the game?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss March."

"Are you one of the fools?"

"Well, really — I don't quite know. I'd like to explain if I can."

She said:

"Look here, are you one of his crowd? I don't quite get you. Idiots who talk that sort of stuff don't dine regularly at a place like

the Pantheon."

He looked at her appeasingly.

"No, I suppose they don't. But I'm the victim of rather extraordinary circumstances. My name's Vance. I've got rather a good post with Killick & Paul. I'm not a cad. If you would allow that I might be able to explain."

She looked at him intently and then turned away.

"Think it over."

He said:

"I will — if you will. That's fair, isn't it?"

But she did not answer his question. She went in and closed the door.

For the next three weeks Vance dined regularly at the Pantheon; the same table was reserved for him; and the same young woman attended with polite impressiveness. He behaved to her just as he had behaved before their meeting in old March's bedroom. He was the perfect patron; she the perfect head-waitress. The same ritual was continued with every attention to detail.

With unsmiling courtesy he could allow himself to wish her good evening. She allowed him the echo.

"Good evening, sir."

And yet, there was something back of the eyes of both of them, a watchfulness, interrogation, conflict.

The ceremony of life continued.

"Thick or clear soup, sir?"

Vance was gazing intently at the menu.

"Oh — clear, I think. Am I allowed to have clear soup?"

"Just as you choose, sir."

"Clear soup then, please. And some sole. And — when am I to be allowed — to explain?"

He looked up at her. She was busy with her pencil and her pink paper slip. Her face was unreadable.

"That particular dish is not on the menu, sir."

"No. But I have been waiting three weeks for it to turn up."

She continued to scribble with her pencil.

"The manager and chef are responsible."

"But won't you put in a word?"

Deliberately she placed one of the slips from her book close to his bread plate, and turned to the next table. Vance glanced at the slip of paper, and then crumbled it up, and with an air of self-conscious innocence — slipped it into his pocket.

The Three Trees

IT WAS A STORMY SEPTEMBER WITH HUGE CLOUDS PILING THEMSELVES in an intense blue sky, and scuds of rain and floods of sunshine following fast upon each other, but to Pauline Marsac, the artist who was staying at Yew Tree Farm, this wet September was a glory and a delight.

She had come down to the Wealden country for atmosphere and an inspiration for one of her typical landscapes, England in one of its many moods, and though the weather made her expeditions somewhat patchy, never had she felt happier in her work. These stormy skies; blue, white and black; these woods and hills of green and gold and amethyst; these sudden gushes of yellow light; the grey smoke of the rain! She revelled, for in colour and the mystery of colour she saw the mystic garments of her god.

One evening she came back past Mount Hall, smokeless and tragic among its oaks and beeches, its two great cedars black against a green blue sky. The old, red, Queen Anne house surprised her. It was her first glimpse of it; and as she stood looking at it across the park she realized its emptiness. Another English home, she supposed, killed by the great war.

At the farm Mrs. Hathaway suggested a fire.

"It might be winter, Miss."

A sudden shower was beating against the windows, and the quick clouds had shut out a transiently gleaming sun.

"Yes; a fire. I'm rather wet. What a comfortable woman you are, Mrs. Hathaway."

She drew up a chair, delighting in the thought of a blaze, while Mrs. Hathaway knelt down, matchbox in hand.

"Who does the old red house belong to?"

"What, Mount Hall, Miss?"

"Is that its name? It looks empty and unhappy."

The farmer's wife was holding a match to the paper.

"Miss Orchardson lived there."

"Not Miss Eleanor Orchardson who wrote the famous book that caused all that scandal?"

"I don't know much about the book, Miss, save that after her death it was found out that she had written it; and that a man — a friend — had pretended ——"

"Yes — I know. Hangard. It was one of our last year's sensations. A very dirty affair. But when did Miss Orchardson die?"

"She didn't die; she was killed."

"Oh!"

"Thrown off her horse. Yes; she was queer, a tall woman with big black eyes. Hated men — they say — and loved horses. Lived alone there — with a cousin — Miss Horn. That fellow who tried to thieve her book used to come ——"

Pauline was watching the kindling fire.

"A character! Yes; I heard a good deal. We were interested. Didn't Miss Orchardson paint?"

"What, her face, Miss? No; she had one of those white faces."

"I meant pictures."

"Oh, pictures. I believe she did. And wrote poetry, and used to go riding about the country at all hours. A wild woman. She liked wild horses, and it was a wild horse that killed her."

"How old was she?"

"How old? Oh, well — what you would call thirtyish."

"That means thirty-nine. And what about the house?"

Mrs. Hathaway got up, with a lift of the shoulders.

"Ah, there you are! They say her will was the queerest thing. The house was to be left just as it was, furniture and all, though once a month two women from the village have the job of cleaning it up a bit. Empty. Yes. Uncomfortable — I call it. And that's to go on for twenty years. Least ways — that's the gossip."

Pauline Marsac spread her hands to the fire.

"This is lovely. But what a queer story. And where did her money go?"

"To a home for worn-out horses, most of it. Though I suppose Miss Horn — the cousin — had some. She's got a little house in the village."

"That's the woman who showed up Stephen Hangard when he

had stolen 'Mary Wilberforce.'"

"I never heard he stole a lady, Miss."

"No; that was the name of Miss Orchardson's book. Well — I think I will have China tea to-day, Mrs. Hathaway. And I'll make myself some toast."

At ten o'clock Pauline Marsac went to bed in a room whose ceiling was a crisscross of beams and joists. The floor undulated, tilting her towards the mirror, and back again towards the mahogany bedstead, with its orange-coloured quilt. The quilt belonged to Pauline. Happy in her craft she went to bed like a child, ready for the next day's game, and as she grew drowsy she had the impression that the wind had dropped, and that stars were shining in a clear sky.

At Yew Tree Farm there was nothing to disturb you save the natural noises; chanticleer saluting the grey dawn, twittering sparrows, the wind in the trees; but Pauline slept less well than usual. She dreamed, and yet it was not quite a dream. Something seemed to be pressing through the portals of sleep. She awoke twice with the impression that a voice had been calling her, an urgent voice.

"Pauline Marsac — Pauline Marsac?"

On the second occasion she lay and stared at the blind which was neither black nor grey, but a tint between the two, and as she lay there she saw projected upon the blind a very distinct picture. Three trees on a big and swelling mound. The mound had the shape of an old round tumulus, and the trees were Scotch pines, tall of trunk, with wind-blown, spreading tops.

An hallucination!

She sat up. The thing on the blind had vanished, but it hung vividly before the eyes of her mind, so vividly that she saw the characteristic gestures of the trees.

One of them had a very long, flat branch stretching out horizontally. She got out of bed and pulled up the blind, finding the first greyness of a still, September morning, with a moon low down towards the sea, and no wind moving.

A ghost world.

She was aware of a peculiar impulse. A sketch book and pencil lay on a round table near the window, and they seemed to offer themselves.

Those three trees on the mound!

She had never seen them, and might never see them, but she felt impelled to put them on paper. She slipped on her dressing-gown, sat down, and sketched the tumulus and the Scotch pines as she had seen them on the blind.

Her comments were practical.

"Of course — it was some sort of projection. My subconsciousness. I must have seen three such trees and forgotten them. But where?"

In the morning when Mrs. Hathaway came in with the breakfast tray, Pauline Marsac showed her the sketch.

"Have you ever seen anything like that?"

Mrs. Hathaway had an immediate answer.

"You have got it exact, Miss."

"What?"

"Why, The Mount."

She looked at Pauline as though to say:

"Why, of course you know it. You've drawn it, and you have eyes in your head."

Pauline said nothing. She picked up the teapot, and glanced for a moment at the window.

"The weather looks better."

"Sure. There's a change. And about time, I think."

It was a day of blue and gold, and Pauline went out with the deliberate purpose of discovering those three Scotch pines. She asked Mrs. Hathaway no questions beyond an enquiry as to the Mount Hall park and gardens.

"Are visitors allowed it?"

"Sure. You would be. Ask at the lodge; there's someone in charge."

Pauline's frank face and her happy smile carried her through most gateways, and the lodge-keeper proved friendly. In this wild Wealden country few people troubled to trespass over a derelict estate, and as the lodge-keeper put it and considering the state of the fences — a stranger might get in and go anywhere without a "by-your-leave." The lady from Mrs. Hathaway's could paint what she pleased. The only person likely to make trouble would be Miss Horn who lived down in the village: "An obstropolous — funny-tempered sort of woman," but she was away at the moment.

Pauline invaded the park. The beauty of it delighted her for it was a place of many vistas that ended in the blue of the hills or the blue of the sea. She wandered, glancing now and again at the white window frames and red walls of the house. Glycine and roses and a vine hung there, and the vine was turning colour. But she had come to discover those three trees; they should form an obvious and a conspicuous landmark, and yet she could not find them.

She wandered for an hour before she tried a narrow green valley running between hanging beechwoods. It took her up and up, curving westwards, to open upon rolling bluffs and great sweeps of turf and bracken, and as she climbed the slopes she saw suddenly before her on the sky line a mound and three tall trees.

"Of course I must have seen it before and not taken it in—consciously," she reflected.

But the knoll and the trees puzzled her. They formed so distinct and arrestive a feature, a landmark not likely to be missed by an artist's eye. Their wind-blown isolation, their tinted trunks and dark outline would have made her pause, and pause with a little exultant thrill.

"Queer!" she thought.

She climbed the slope behind them. Yes; there was that flat, projecting bough spread like a big hand. The outlines seemed exact, and she was studying the towering tops of the trees when she realized the presence of the man.

He was sitting with his back to one of the trees, his face towards the great sweep of country that ended in the sea. He was quite unaware of her. He had no hat and was dressed in rough tweeds. He just sat and stared seawards with a kind of melancholy fixity as though all the life of the landscape lay in the past, and he was nothing more than a sad spectator of the present. He was dark and clean shaven, and sombre, a man who would take sorrow hardly, who would not struggle and protest. Weak, yes, in a way, but with elements of fineness, of quixotry. She felt that she had seen him before.

Anyway, he was there, very much in possession, though judging by the look of him he would easily be dispossessed. Her intuition was to sketch those trees and to compare the sketch made from the original with the vision of them she had seen projected upon her

bedroom blind.

She walked around the base of the mound, realizing that the man would be in the picture, and she hated being watched when she was at work. Some silly little human figure dotted in the foreground! she glanced up at him. He was staring at her.

She withdrew until she had the mound and the trees at the right distance, and then seated herself on the grass. She was busy with her sketch-book, and when her glance returned to the mound she found that the man had risen and was coming down the hill towards her.

He looked annoyed, but his annoyance included curiosity. And his curiosity had an element of fierceness. She wondered why he made her think of a man who was starving.

His obvious intention was to pass her, but an interchange of glances appeared to make him pause.

"I'll get out of your way," he said.

Pauline Marsac smiled at him.

"Thank you. But I have no right here."

His eyes gave her their melancholy and self-conscious stare.

"Nor have I."

It was his business to walk on, but he hesitated, and she felt that he wanted to ask her some question. The thing that surprised her was that she found herself feeling suddenly and unexplainably sorry for the man, which was absurd, so she took it upon herself to ask him a question.

"I suppose this is The Mount?"

He looked startled.

"Oh — yes —" and his glance touched her sketch-book.

"Thank you. It took me quite a long while to find it."

His eyes narrowed. He stood fidgeting one foot against a grass tussock.

"I suppose you are doing this for Miss Horn?"

Her surprise was obvious.

"I beg your pardon? I am doing it for myself."

"Oh — I thought she might have commissioned you; illustrations — you know — for a book."

Pauline had begun to be more interested in the man than in the trees.

"Is Miss Horn writing a book?"

"I have heard so."

"Let me see, she was Miss Orchardson's cousin, wasn't she?"

"That's so."

"Is it a life of the woman who wrote 'Mary Wilberforce?' "

He gave her a queer, flaring look as though he were a wild creature and she had shot an arrow into him.

"She didn't write it," he said.

And then he went past her and down the hill like a man running away from something, leaving her to grope at the meaning of it all. For she felt sure now that she had seen his face somewhere, in a crowd, or in a magazine or picture paper.

She made her sketch of The Mount, and on comparing it with the rough drawing that she had made in the farmhouse bedroom she found an almost complete correspondence between them, though the finished sketch had more atmosphere.

"Well, it's a rum incident," she reflected.

That evening Pauline Marsac decided to paint The Mount, and she went to bed thinking of it, and fell asleep almost at once. Something woke her at the same hour, just between the black and the grey, and she saw The Mount projected upon the blind, but this time there was a figure in the picture, the seated figure of a man.

"Oh, hang it," she thought; "I'm not a sentimentalist. I don't want him there."

She sat up in bed, and it occurred to her with peculiar suddenness that the man had a right to be there, more right than she had.

"Well — anyway — I'll paint those trees," she decided.

When she set out next morning for The Mount, Pauline Marsac wondered whether she would find him there. It seemed to her improbable yet likely — fated almost. And he was there, sitting at the foot of the big flat branch spread out like a huge hand or a sounding-board.

He got up and came down to meet her, and she thought that his eyes looked queer. He glanced at all her artist's paraphernalia that she had brought with her.

"Excuse me — are you going to paint this?"

In spite of her curiosity she was annoyed with him for being here. He distracted her.

"I am."

"But what right have you——?"

If there was going to be an argument, she thought that she would get it over with straight away.

"No legal right. Do you happen to be the agent or something?"

"I'm nothing!" he said with a touch of dramatic self-pity.

She put down her belongings.

"Yet you seem to suggest——"

"I?"

"Yes — a sort of authority. You seem to come here often — but I'll bet you that the cause of my coming was much more curious. I'll tell you if you are out to question my right to come here."

"I thought that Miss Horn——"

"I know nothing about Miss Horn, save that she was Miss Orchardson's cousin, and took the principal part in proving that Hangard had purloined——"

And then she paused, for she saw on his face a kind of exasperated despair.

"I happen to be Hangard," he said, "and I wrote that book. That's the irony of it — that they should have thought me capable. You see — I loved her."

He looked over her head towards the sea, and she saw that he was smiling, a tormented smile.

"Of course — I don't expect you to believe it. No one does. I'm just a shabby and ingenious cad. The woman got back at me as she always said she would."

"What, Eleanor Orchardson?"

"Good God! no. Kate Horn. Jealousy. But I should never have dreamed——"

Pauline Marsac looked at the three trees.

"Why not tell me about it," she said. "I don't suppose it will take long."

His eyes faltered.

"You wouldn't believe. It sounds too queer."

"Queer things happen. Let's sit under the trees."

She climbed to the top of the mound and he followed her, and stood hesitating.

"Do you mind if I sit there——?"

"Where?"

"At the foot of this tree. She — used to sit here, and I used to lie at her feet. It was here that I told her the plot of 'Mary Wilberforce.'"

She let him have the sacred place, seating herself a little to one side of it.

"The trouble was the manuscript, wasn't it?"

"Yes. You see — it was my first book. In a way she had inspired it. We were rather — devoted. She said the book held the blood of both of us. Kate Horn typed it; she acted as Eleanor's secretary. My publishers never saw the manuscript, only the typescript. Eleanor wanted the original. She had queer whims; she set herself to copy the whole of my manuscript; she said that when we died I should have her manuscript, and she mine. And then she was killed, just three months before the book was published."

He paused, pulling at the short grass.

"When the book had been out a week my publishers had a most amazing letter."

"From Miss Horn?"

"Exactly. It asserted that Eleanor had written the book — and that I was exploiting the work of a dead woman. My publishers wired to me. I went to see them. I said the whole thing was absurd. They asked for the manuscript. Well, I hadn't got it. I came down here and had a most ghastly row with Kate. She swore there was only one manuscript, Eleanor's.

"Well — what could I do? I had to go through with it. I was bewildered by the woman's vindictiveness. She wrote to the papers. Oh, well, perhaps you know what happened. She produced Eleanor's manuscript, she swore that she had seen Eleanor writing the book, and that she herself had typed it. My tale did look a little lame."

"But then — your previous work?"

"That was just part of the trouble. You see 'Mary Wilberforce,' was different from anything I had done before. It was a thing by itself, an inspiration. The literary experts who were called had to admit this. Even the style was different. So Kate Horn had me in the mud."

Pauline stroked her cheek.

"But couldn't you have written another book — a masterpiece —

to prove ——?"

He shrugged.

"I did — at least, I tried to. But things wouldn't come. I was too jarred. I had lost her. And all my thoughts were of trying to find the original manuscript."

"The woman burnt it?"

"But did she? I have a feeling that Kate never had it, that it is hidden away somewhere."

He sat and gloomed. She felt that he was sorry in a way that he had told her, and that he was suffering from an exaggerated sense of humiliation. His attitude towards her became vaguely defiant. Of course she did not believe him.

"What a tragedy," she said.

He remained mute.

"To lose — two such things. And what had you done to the woman Horn that she was so much your enemy?"

"Nothing."

"That was just the reason. Well — I haven't told you how it was I happened to come here."

She could see that he was too absorbed in his own tragedy to care to listen to her gossip, but she thought that it would be good for him to be dragged for a moment out of his slough of despond, so she jumped up and went down to where her things were lying, and returned with her sketch book.

"I am staying at Yew Tree Farm."

"Oh," he said vaguely.

"The night before last I woke about dawn and saw a picture on my window blind. I had had a feeling that someone had called me by name. 'Pauline Marsac.' The experience was so vivid that I got up and drew what I had seen on the blind, and next morning I showed the sketch to Mrs. Hathaway at the farm, and asked her if she knew any place near here that was like it."

She passed him the original sketch, and watched his face as he examined it.

"But this is The Mount."

"Yes."

"And you say you saw this on your blind, and drew it from

memory, though you had never seen it before?"

"It's a fact."

"Extraordinary! So — yesterday ——?"

"I was looking for the original. That's how we met. And early this morning I saw The Mount a second time on my blind."

"Just the same?"

"Not quite. There was a figure."

"Hers?"

"No; yours."

He studied the two sketches, and then, handing them back to her, sat and looked towards the sea.

"Do you believe in this sort of thing?"

"What sort of thing?"

"All the psychic stuff?"

"I'm afraid I do."

"But you must have seen these trees before."

"I hadn't; at least, not consciously."

"Ah — that's it."

"Yes; but why should I see them, as I did, projected upon my window blind? That's the point, isn't it? There must be a reason."

"Oh, I suppose so. Possibly."

He appeared sceptical, wilfully so, and she felt that his wilfulness was part of the reaction caused by his suffering. He would not let himself feel or believe that there could be any significance in the incident.

"You have never had any such experience?" she asked him.

"No; nothing definite."

"You are sceptical. But supposing someone who was dead, wanted to get a message to you, a message of vital importance?"

"Well, supposing there was such a message, why should it come through you."

"Obviously, because you are not receptive."

"That's nonsense," he said rather rudely.

And then he apologized.

"I'm sorry. But I'm all on edge. I wish to God I could get some such message."

"With regard to the manuscript of 'Mary Wilberforce?' "

"Ah — if it were possible!"

Pauline spent the day painting The Mount while Stephen Hangard lay on the grass and gloomed. She was conscious of his presence, but it did not distract her, for he kept quiet and did not talk, and about noon he got up and left her. She gathered that he was staying at a farmhouse somewhere between Mount Hill and Beechhurst village.

"That woman comes back to-morrow," he said, "I shall clear out as soon as she returns."

"Isn't that doing what she wants?"

"I can't help it. The thought of her being about here makes me ill."

That night Pauline Marsac's experience was repeated.

She saw The Mount upon her blind, but instead of there being three trees there were four.

The discrepancy astonished her, and she lay awake puzzling over it.

At breakfast she put a question to Mrs. Hathaway.

"By the way, I am painting The Mount. I suppose there were never more than three trees there?"

"There used to be four, Miss."

"Four! You are quite sure?"

"Certain. One of the four died, and was cut down. That must have been about ten years ago."

Her climb to the mound that morning was a flutter of excitement. She had left all her paraphernalia behind, for the artist had been lost in the woman, and she wanted to reach the tumulus before Hangard should arrive if he intended paying the place a last visit. Her curiosity centred itself about that fourth tree; she wondered whether there was any vestige of it remaining.

The Mount was deserted, and she had no trouble in discovering the position of the fourth tree. A slight swelling of the turf on the very summit of the mound partly concealed the old stump, and a portion of the old butt protruded. One or two of the twisted roots were visible, and she noticed that a rabbit had been scratching in the grassy hollow between two of the roots.

"That ought to satisfy him," she thought.

Glancing seawards she discovered him far below her on the green slope toiling slowly upwards. She waved. Her excitement stood

unconcealed.

"I have found something."

He heard her, and came hurrying with eager and upturned face. "What is it?"

"Last night I saw a fourth tree. There was a fourth tree. I have found the stump of it."

He looked vastly disappointed, and he made no attempt to conceal it.

"I'm afraid the discovery leaves me cold."

"Heavens!" she said, "with your imagination, too! Lend me your stick."

She seized it from him, and running to the top of the mound she began to poke at the turf about the butt of the vanished tree, while Hangard stood and watched her with ironic gloom. What did she expect to find there, this absurd but rather charming creature with the bright eyes. And suddenly he saw the stick disappear for half its length into the green turf, like a stage dagger that slides into its hilt.

Her eyes were all lit up. He heard her cry out.

"Oh — come, feel this."

He put his hand to the crook of the stick.

"Tap — tap gently."

He obeyed her, and felt the jarring of the ferrule upon a metallic surface.

"There's a hollow there, and something in it. Don't you realize ——?"

It took him less than twenty minutes — working with stick and hands — to grub the thing from the hollow under the tree stump. They knelt and stared at it in silence, a black deed-box, sealed, and with E. Orchardson painted in white upon the top. The box was locked.

"Well — your scepticism ——"

"Scepticism! What's in it? If ——"

She laid a hand on his shoulder.

"One moment, had it not better be opened officially — before witnesses?"

He nodded.

"There's old Carfax, her lawyer, down in the village."

"Yes; and what about Kate Horn? Wouldn't it be as well——?"

"My God," he said, "if it should prove——!"

At six o'clock that evening the strange affair was carried to its crisis. They had had to wait till six for Kate Horn's arrival. She came in with those cold and defiant eyes of hers set hard in her thin pale face. Old Carfax waggled his pince-nez at her.

"This box, Miss Horn, do you know anything of it?"

She stared at the thing on the table, and her face twitched slightly.

"No; nothing."

"It has been found. We thought it fair that you should be present. Smith, you can get to work."

When the local locksmith bent over the box Miss Horn gave Hangard one look of hatred and defiance. But Hangard's eyes were watching the man. It seemed to him a long while before the lid was raised, and old Carfax — bending over the box — took out a parcel and a letter.

He read the writing on the envelope and then looked over the tops of his glasses at Hangard.

"It is addressed to you in Miss Orchardson's writing. And this parcel."

Hangard, white as the paper, broke the pink tapes that bound the parcel. He turned back the wrappings.

"My manuscript! The manuscript of 'Mary Wilberforce!' The letter — her letter. It explains. Eleanor had buried it — there."

The Red Van

AGAINST THE BLACK BULK OF THE CATHEDRAL AND FACING THE "Panier d'Or," a red van diffused a half circle of light over the heads and shoulders of a small crowd. Not only was the van painted red, but the open side of it displayed a row of electric lights brilliant behind screens of red glass. The thing was both a shop and a stage, and beneath the glare of the lights a little figure in a top hat, black dinner-jacket and white shirt gesticulated and declaimed.

It was Monsieur François, or just François, proclaiming the virtues of his Electric Pills.

Nearly everyone in the Pas de Calais or Nord knew François and his red motor-van. He would arrive on market day in St. Omer, or Hazebrouk, Amiens, Abbeville or St. Venant, let down the side of his travelling show and display to the provincial mind all that electrical gear from which he extracted buzzings and chatterings and flashes of light. He made a great noise, but even so his noise was less silly and more pragmatical than the noise made by the children of the silly rich who turn on gramophones in hotels at nine o'clock on a summer morning.

François was both an artist and a wag. He had a little, white, fat, cheeky face, bright black eyes, immense self-assurance, and a manner. He could shout and declaim for hours through all the bravura of market day, and his voice never failed him. Once or twice during the performance he would swallow one of his own pills.

"There, you see. I never tire; I am never ill. I can talk all day and work half the night. I have a voice. You hear it. The cock on the church steeple hears it. And muscle — too. Look."

He seized a cavalry sabre and brandished it, and the red light from above ran along it and seemed to drop from it like blood.

"I am strong; I am healthy. And why? Because of my great discovery. A drug may be just a drug, my friends, but charge it with

electricity — and *voilà!* Life is electricity. Oh, yes, the doctors, the doctors, the Faculty of Medicine! Poof! They will not believe; they are jealous. But you want the right drug, and the right charge of electricity. That is my discovery."

He raised his top hat impressively. He was an actor. He had all the tricks and the emotional suggestiveness of a priest in a pulpit.

"I salute Science. I salute all the eminent and noble searchers. I salute Galvani and Volta, Pasteur and Koch. I am jealous of no man. I, too, have made my discovery."

He spread his arms as though preparing to embrace humanity, and babbled his fat cheeks at the crowd.

"Come, I will show you how these wonderful pills are charged with the life force. It looks very simple. All great things look simple. But it takes the great man to discover them. Ha! Someone laughs! I love laughter. I, too, can laugh."

And he went off into a burst of buoyant, irresponsible laughter, and took a long glass tube, and closed one end of it with red wool, and dropped in half a dozen of his pills, and closed the other end of the tube with more red wool.

"*Voilà!* We are ready. Now watch. I place the tube between these powerful batteries. Gr-r-r—t-t-ch!"

He turned a handle and there were splutterings and flashings, and he raised his hat and gazed reverently upon the glass tube.

"There. You see. The wonderful thing has now happened. Swallow those pills and you swallow life, health, happiness."

François had a wife, rather small and solid like himself, and very much the *Dea Mater* behind the scenes. Madame François had fair hair, a squarish head and chin, eyes of greyish-green suggesting the eyes of a determined child. In fact there was something childlike about her, and while François lived on his loquacity, this little woman in miniature was silent and somewhat inscrutable.

She had a soft squareness, an air of sturdy wisdom, and François adored her. It is still possible for a man to adore his wife, and François might marvel, for Madame Claire somehow managed to believe in him. She liked to speak of him as The Professor, and it is possible that Monsieur François after years of fervid declaiming, and encouraged by his wife's admiration, had come to believe that he had made a discovery, that he had fumbled his way into some mystery like

a child playing with a bunch of keys. The Electric Pills did possess some potent virtue. They were more than nux-vomica and aloes.

At Bethune the show was over. Madame Claire had ceased to pass little boxes of pills to her husband through a slit in the red curtain behind the lamps and batteries. Beasts, human, and otherwise, had been sold. The great tower of the church — with its two round windows which gave it the look of an owl — was lost in obscurity. François removed his hat and carefully laid it aside. His forehead glistened. A few children still stood and stared.

François threw them two five-centime pieces for a scramble. He was feeling rich; the day had been good.

"Run away, my dears. Pills — at your age — are not necessary."

From behind the red curtain came sounds of tidying up.

"What was that, François?"

"Two small pieces of money, *chérie,* to the children."

Madame sighed. Such a life as theirs did not permit of children, and both of them had a liking for children. She said:

"We have sold thirty-seven boxes."

François made a clicking noise with his tongue.

"This is an intelligent town. My dear, I'm hungry."

"Shall we have supper here?"

"No; I prefer to be at my ease. We will run the old bus into the yard of the 'Three Stars.'"

He was detaching wires and making things ship-shape for the night. With the click of a switch all the red lights went out. He said, with a voice of fat contentment:

"To-morrow we will go to Paradis."

The voice behind the curtain protested.

"Not Paradis."

"Why not? It is a good place."

"But the doctor is *méchant* there."

François laughed.

"The doctor! Poof, a jealous fellow. I will run him through with my sabre."

"But you remember the last occasion."

"Yes; that was a joke, certainly. The fellow should not come and stand on the edge of the crowd and glare. And he had jaundice, and I offered to present him with a box of pills. Ta-ra-ra! And he called

me a dirty quack."

"It does not do you any good, François."

"Why, I'm not afraid of the fellow. It was a good advertisement. And I had the best of the small talk. We did well there. Come along, my dear, let's get the old ship under way."

Madame François joined him, and together they raised the side of the van, and bolted it, shutting away all that mystery. François lit the lamps; they were oil lamps to save electricity for the pills. He raised the bonnet flap and tickled the carburettor.

"Is she in a good temper? I wonder?"

She was. The engine started at the third pull of the handle, making a chattering roar which François rushed to control with a tweak at the throttle lever. He climbed into the driving-seat and his wife placed herself beside him. The red van and the magnetic pills rolled away to the yard of the "Three Stars."

Parked there, Monsieur and Madame François were at home in the apartment behind the red curtains which was salon, kitchen, and bedchamber. They supped. Claire could produce excellent little dishes over the oil stove; she ceased to be mute. But on this particular night she had an air of depression. Her round eyes looked at the omelette as though she saw poison in it.

"I do not like the idea of going to Paradis."

François, in his shirt-sleeves, was jocular.

"Oh, come now, you are bound to go there. Had I proposed the other place, well, an objection would have been reasonable. Angel."

He kissed his wife.

"Paradis! Inevitable. If the doctor is a devil we'll order him to go to hell."

Monsieur François' vitality was such, that, like the exuberances of a child, it seemed churlish to quarrel with it. Monsieur François was Madame Claire's child, and she loved him at all times and in all places, even when he shaved himself and reproached her if she shook their flimsy house on wheels by moving about in it. So the red van trundled along the road to Paradis between rows of Lombardy poplars through which the wind played and made perpetual murmuring. It was June, and the wheat-fields were as vivid as young grass in wet meadows. Great white clouds sailed the sky. The professor's red van raised little swirls of dust; he drove with

less exuberance than he wished, for the Chariot of the Pills was more than twelve years old and very precious. François had to cherish it as he cherished his health.

But, strangely enough, on that perfect June day, with the spire of the church of Paradis piercing the green canopy of groves of poplars, Monsieur François did not feel himself. He was aware of a chilliness, a languor, vague inward discomfort. He perspired, but he persisted.

"Surely it is very hot."

Claire agreed with him as to the heat.

"It is the engine, too, perhaps. Look."

A faint plume of steam was rising from the radiator cap.

"*Tien*. Yes, she is feeling it too. She needs some of our pills."

He insisted on jocularity. He had set out to go to Paradis and defy that devil of a doctor; and go there he would, in spite of the heat and this feeling of vague physical distress. He was aware of inward qualms, but doubtless they too were due to the heat. Courage! Business was business.

So he drove the red van up the long street of Paradis, and past the house of Dr. Georges Blanc, a tall and narrow house with sneering windows, and parked his show in the "place" by the church, close to a row of pollarded limes. He raised his hat to a group of old women who had brought out their crochet and their mending to the seats under the shade of the trees.

Monsieur François was always polite, especially to the ladies. He knew how to enter a town or village, and also how to leave. It was necessary to be a little gaillard and sensational. But it seemed even hotter in the "place" of Paradis, with the sun blazing down and the houses shutting off the air. It was as though their doorways, like greedy mouths, sucked in all the freshness.

Monsieur François mopped his forehead.

"My dear," he said, "I think I will have a little glass of cognac with my lunch. And perhaps a little sleep afterwards. We will open the show when it gets cooler. Besides, we must wait till the people come back from the fields."

Monsieur François had his little glass of cognac and his little sleep, while his wife sat silently mending a pair of her husband's socks. It was unusual for François to sleep in the middle of the

day, and she wondered, and watched him a little anxiously. He appeared uneasy in his sleep, as though some grumble of pain made itself felt.

He woke about half-past three. The van was insufferably hot, though Claire had opened the window and set the door ajar. If you opened the door too lavishly children would be sure to poke their heads inside.

"*Mon dieu,* it is hot!"

He sat up, and with a wince of the mouth, put his hand to his side.

Madame regarded him intently.

"François, you are ill?"

But the pride of the Professor was piqued. He — ill? Not a bit of it. It was the heat, and he was feeling a little upset inside, and he would take a dose of salts before going to bed. Besides, there was Dr. Georges Blanc to be considered. Monsieur François was going to sell his pills in Paradis and under the doctor's nose, even if the sky turned to molten brass.

"Give me a glass of water, my dear. François is never ill."

About six o'clock the show opened. The side of the van had been lowered, and Monsieur François, looking rather pallid and greasy, began to potter about and make mysterious preparations. He wore his top hat at a jaunty angle; his white shirt bulged. People began to gather, women, children, men back from the fields who grinned at each other and tried to look sceptical. François smiled at them and rubbed his hands.

"Ha, you look very healthy in Paradis, but I am going to tell you a thing or two. The ladies have bright eyes, but I have something that will make them brighter."

The crowd increased, and François switched on all his lights and crackled his electric gear. He seemed as full of joy as usual. He was inspired, strung up to a particular effort. His bright little eyes watched for his enemy, and in due course he saw the long, sardonic face of Dr. Blanc hung like a mocking mask at the back of the crowd.

Dr. Blanc was a very tall man with moustachios like one of the great Napoleon's grenadiers, and a spot of bright colour on either cheek. His eyes were set rather like the eyes of a goat.

No doubt professional dignity and a nice sense of proportion

should have prevented Dr. Blanc from meddling with the activities of a sedulous little quack, but Dr. Blanc was a quarrelsome person. He held very strong views upon irresponsible charlatanry. Moreover, for some years he had been a childless widower, and a man who lives alone and has no one either to spoil or to contradict him, is always in danger of riding the lean horse of prejudice to death. Dr. Blanc was something of a fanatic, and as ready as a priest to challenge and attack heresy.

He stood and stared fixedly upon the busy little figure of François. His nostrils quivered; his long grey moustachios were fierce and Gallic. It is possible that he thought that the concentrated stare of an accredited practitioner might disconcert the quack, but it had an opposite effect upon Monsieur François. Like the heat it both upset and enraged him; it broiled him in exceptional efforts; it inflamed his audacity. He began to return the doctor's glare, and to throw his remarks in the direction of that formidable face.

"My discovery, ladies and gentlemen, was not made in the provinces. I, too, have studied in Paris. I have visited the United States of America. I do not keep a drug-shop at the back of an old house. I travel and see the world. I am ready to challenge the whole Faculty of Medicine, the Sorbonne, all the Academies. I live and prove my profession. Look at me."

He spread his arms.

"Health. Have I ever been ill? Never. In Paradis is there illness — sometimes? I see there your eminent physician. I will challenge him to answer that question."

The crowd shuffled and stirred. It felt the excitement of an emotional situation, conflict, the spice of a hot argument. Faces were turned towards Dr. Blanc.

His eyes seemed to stand out on stalks. He stood with his heels together, shoulders squared.

"I am not a liar."

Monsieur François bowed.

"That is a good answer. Monsieur tells us the truth. He confesses ——"

But Dr. Blanc's voice cut him short. It was like a tusk jabbed into François' plump little body.

"But that man is a liar. I have a box of his pills. I have analysed

them. It is my duty to stand here and save my fellow-citizens from trash and humbug. I do not argue."

François was perspiring, for the pain in him had ceased to be a vague qualm and had suddenly become acute and poignant.

"Nor do I argue, my friends. I say that my discovery is a cure which the learned profession——"

He winced, and Dr. Blanc's sergeant-major's voice cut the air.

"That man is a liar. I will tell you. That man is ill. He stands up and pretends to all you healthy people who work in the fields that he is healthier than you are. Look at him. I am a doctor. I say that man is ill."

The crowd gazed upon François, and it gazed in silence, for something was happening in front of the red lamps. In spite of all that rosy glow the professor's face had a ghastly sallowness. His mouth was twisted; his eyes looked sunken. And suddenly and incontinently before them all Monsieur François was sick. It was a catastrophe, a disaster.

Dr. Blanc stood with his head reared, gazing. Something flickered in his eyes. Triumph — perhaps? He appeared to stand stiffly, hesitating, as though casual man and social man were in conflict. Then he turned and walked slowly away.

But a woman's voice had uttered a cry. The red curtains were pulled aside, and François' wife had her hands on her husband's shoulders. She drew him through the curtains. Both of them disappeared.

The crowd dispersed itself from about the red van; but much of it remained in doorways and under the shade of the trees, for its interest in the red van and its inhabitants had become controversial. The men were inclined to laugh, and to applaud Dr. Georges. "That fat little humbug has it in the stomach." The women were more for the professor, for women rally to any man who makes a mystery of things. Also, there was another woman in the van — a woman whose man was sick.

One or two of them approached the door of the van, and the eldest of them knocked.

"Madame, can we be of any use?"

Claire's face appeared in the doorway, very serious and pale.

"A thousand thanks. If we could have a little fresh milk. Mon-

sieur François is resting. It is the heat which has affected him."

Meanwhile, inside the van, François was confronting his Waterloo. The pain had abated, and he was talking of resuming the battle, but Claire was obdurate.

"I told you this place was unlucky. That doctor and his goat's eyes! We will get out of it. We will go to Merville; Merville is a good place."

François, peevish and pale, was compelled to agree. Very well then, but he would retreat in order; there should be no rout, with that beast of a Prussian in pursuit. He would get up and make a speech to the people of Paradis, apologize for his lapse and explain it, and promise to return to Paradis. He would depart with a dignified gesture.

Dusk was filling the "place" when the professor arose and donned his helmet, the inevitable top hat. Looking very white, he stood on the steps of the red van and addressed a few women and some children. He raised his hat to them and attempted a flourish, a jocular sally, but his wit lacked sparkle. The side of the van had to be raised and bolted, and Madame François assisted, standing on a wooden box, for she was too short to reach the bolts without it.

François removed himself to the starting handle of the red van, bent down, gripped a dumb-iron and gave a pull. But nothing happened. He tried again, groaning slightly, and uttering soft imprecations. His hat fell off. He picked it up, dusted it, flooded the carburettor, and tried again, but when he tried to pull, something hurt inside him.

"*Mon Dieu,* she is a devil!"

He pushed his hat back, wiped his forehead, and readjusted his hat.

"My dear, we shall have to swing her. I am not myself."

His wife joined him, and together they bent and wound at the starting handle, their two bodies pressed together in a kind of anguish of effort. The engine, relenting, started with a roar. François, livid and perspiring, climbed up behind the wheel; his wife joined him; the red van lurched forward over the cobbles of the "place." A few children scampered after it with shouts of derision.

Standing at his window, and conscious of a strange and accusing melancholy, Dr. Georges Blanc saw the red van go by.

"Exodus," he thought; "Paradis is purged of them. Pedlars of pills. But they are two and I am one. But for my work I would wish to die."

Night fell. The red van had lit its lights and had travelled a couple of kilometres when it swerved to the side of the road and stopped. A row of beech trees threw a mass of shadow over the vehicle. Monsieur François, with teeth set, was leaning over the steering wheel.

"Oh, *mon Dieu,* the pain!" he groaned. "I cannot do it. It is too much, too bad. I am sorry, my dear, but I am beaten."

She embraced him, her face close to his.

"Where is the pain?"

"Down here. Like a hot iron—jabbing. I must lie down."

Claire helped him out of the seat, and into one of the narrow bunks in the interior of the van, and he lay there groaning and twisting. She sat on the other bunk, looking at him, her hands clenched under her chin. She felt helpless.

"François, you must have a doctor."

"A doctor! The devil! Why, no doctor would touch me. Anathema, outcast."

"But you are ill."

He groaned.

"The pain; oh, the pain!"

And suddenly panic seized her, but it was panic with a purpose. She searched for the cognac bottle, gave him a good draught, covered him with a blanket, kissed him and fled. François heard the door slammed, and was suddenly aware of the emptiness of that little cabin. He called after her.

"Claire, Claire, where are you going?"

The wind made a rustling in the leaves of the beech trees.

Madame François ran, she ran toward Paradis. She did not run as Madame François, the wife of a little wandering quack, but as woman in search of help. She was an impulse on two sturdy legs, compassion, poignant and passionate. Her man was in pain, in danger. He was a little, whimpering, groaning boy.

Dr. Georges Blanc had put on his spectacles and was sitting down to read a scientific journal when the door bell rang. It clanged; it appealed; it insisted. The doctor, who for thirty years had listened

to the ringing of that bell, and could diagnose from the quality of its clangour the urge and the need of the messenger, looked over the top of his spectacles at his study door.

"Most certainly a midwifery case. Probably young Blanchard. He is a very new husband, and excitable. Probably he has run all the way from Tete Bois."

Dr. Blanc continued to look over the tops of his spectacles at the study door. He was a man who loved his work, and who persisted in loving it even at the age of five-and-fifty, and because he loved the truth, as he saw it, he hated all quackery and moonshine. The door opened, and his housekeeper put her head into the room.

"A message from the Blanchards?" asked Dr. Georges.

"No; a woman. She says that she must see you."

"Very well. Show her in."

Madame François confronted the doctor. He did not know who she was until she began to speak and to explain with a kind of fierce calmness the nature of her need. She stood looking straight up into the doctor's face, like a determined child; she was flushed; her eyes shone.

"Monsieur, my husband is very ill and in great pain. We are the people who own the red van. Perhaps you will think it gross impertinence that I should come to you, but when a man is in pain——"

The doctor laid his scientific journal on the table.

"Exactly, madame; when there is pain——"

"You will come?"

"Of course."

Her little, determined face lit up.

"You understand, monsieur? My husband is he who sells pills. We were not polite to you to-day."

Dr. Georges, looking even more like a fierce old grenadier, raised his hand to his forehead.

"I understand — perfectly. I salute the spirit of my profession. I am at your service, madame."

"Monsieur, you are a great man. You have the nature of greatness."

Dr. Georges smiled at her.

"Madame, we are two men in one, sometimes three men in one,

but when my bell rings I am the doctor. Where is your husband?"

"In our van, monsieur. He could drive no farther. It is on the road, not very far."

"I will come with you."

So in the darkness of that summer night the doctor of Paradis and the wife of the pedlar of pills set out together for the red van and the grove of beech trees, and the rising moon threw their shadows upon the road — a long shadow and a short one. And because of the mystery of things and the interplay of her emotions Madame François' tongue was loosed, and she began to speak to Dr. Georges as though he were priest, doctor, and man.

She spoke of her husband, and how he in his early days had desired to be a doctor, but that the way of the world and poverty and an early marriage had made such a dream impossible.

"He wanted to go to Paris, monsieur, and study; but in those days a crust of bread was a crust of bread. He would have made a good doctor. But now — of course — he is too old. We had to do the best we could. And his pills, monsieur, are really very good pills, and we are not swindlers, for people have been the better for them. Moreover, monsieur, I love my husband; he has always been *bon garçon*. So you will forgive me."

The doctor's figure looked straight and thin; he carried himself like a grenadier, and he, too, had his head in the moonlight. He was walking suddenly in a world of memories, listening to a woman's voice.

He said:

"Madame, I had advantages. In some of us there is a strange passion to help and to heal. But I love truth. And yet what is truth? We may see it all by moonlight or at full noon, and sometimes we are a little arrogant. And I have my work to do."

She looked up at his fierce old face softened by the moonlight.

"Monsieur, if we came to Paradis no more will you forgive us? We do a little good in our way."

He stalked along like a man thinking deeply.

"Madame, perhaps the little good that we do — is mysterious, willed into us. I do not know. The scientists dogmatize. Perhaps faith still works. It may be that faith can be compounded in a pill."

They came to the red van with its two eyes burning under the beech trees, and Madame François opened the door and spoke softly.

"François—François, the doctor has come."

Her husband's voice sounded small and faint.

"The doctor? *Mon Dieu*, then it is a miracle. What doctor?"

"The doctor from Paradis. How is the pain, my dear?"

"The doctor from Paradis! Well, let him come in. I would take off my hat if I could. The pain, oh — yes — the pain."

Dr. Blanc climbed the steps of the van and removed his hat and sat down on the edge of the bunk beside Monsieur François. Madame held the lamp, and the professor's face, all creased and puckered and pale, looked up at them.

"Monsieur doctor — you came to see me! It is astonishing."

Dr. Georges gently turned back the blanket.

"It is my work."

"Monsieur, I apologize. I wish to withdraw ——"

Said Dr. Georges:

"Let us see what the matter is."

The matter was serious, a sudden flare of rebellion in that little vermiform appendage that man carries about with him in a smaller edition than does his brother the rabbit. Dr. Georges felt and stroked and tapped, and looking grave, announced the fact that Monsieur François could not stay in his van. An operation might be necessary; Monsieur François must be in bed.

But where? Madame, with a finger crooked against her chin, observed that they were homeless people.

Dr. Georges pulled a moustachio thoughtfully.

"We will take him to my house. There is a good, airy bedroom. I will send a telegram. I have a friend, a surgeon."

Paradis had its sensation; for, next morning it became known the red van of the pill seller was standing in the yard at the back of Dr. Georges' tall house, and that Monsieur François himself lay in one of the doctor's beds. Surely this was magnanimity. And the doctor himself had driven off in his automobile to the station five kilometres away and he brought back another doctor with him.

Paradis held its breath, and gossipped under the lime trees. It saw Madame François enter the church. Doubtless she went to pray

there, and when she emerged it was seen that she had been weeping.

Paradis waited. It might be full of tongues, but it was human; and when it was known some days later that an operation had been performed on Monsieur François, and that it had been successful, Paradis in the spirit saluted Dr. Georges. Paradis had pride. Its doctor might sometimes appear to be a rather fierce old curmudgeon, but it seemed that he had the grace of *le bon Dieu*.

But the heart of Monsieur François was troubled. He lay in bed and pondered, for life had become perplexing. He could not boast as he had boasted of yore, and somehow his electric pills had lost their potency. He had a bill to pay, and other liabilities.

He said to his wife:

"My dear, what shall we do? Something has happened in Paradis."

Madame François looked thoughtful.

"I have some money in a stocking. And the pills are good pills. Perhaps if we talked a little less. But then — people — do like a mystery. It seems to me that we shall have to go on selling pills, but not in Paradis."

Such was their fate, but it was not to be final, for when Monsieur François had shaken hands with the doctor and made a little grimace, he knew in his heart of hearts that somehow the virtue was no longer in the business. He had had a shock. The little bladder of his gaillard boastfulness was shrunken.

For a year or so the red van wandered about the roads of northern France, but Monsieur François had ceased to flourish his sabre and to boast of eternal health. He advertised the virtues of his pills more soberly, and the sale of them dwindled.

But one day, the red van reappeared in Paradis. Its coat was the same, though its inwardness had changed. It glittered with crockery, hardware, and was gay with fabrics. It advertised sewing-machines; Monsieur François had obtained a travelling agency.

He stood up as of old and extolled the virtues of sewing-machines. He did it admirably and with conviction. His wife looked a little plumper, and quite happy. A little François inhabited the interior of the van.

Monsieur François called on Dr. Georges.

"Monsieur, my gratitude survives. I now sell sewing-machines. I know all about the inside of sewing-machines. I am a doctor to

sick sewing-machines. No; it is not a boast."

The doctor brought out a bottle of red wine.

"Let a man know what he knows. Monsieur, I salute you. I will with pleasure buy one of your sewing-machines."

Said Monsieur François:

"Monsieur, let us be honest. Already I have sold a sewing-machine to your housekeeper."

Stockings

THE SUN WAS SHINING, AND THE SEA BIT A GREAT BLUE CURVE INTO the rocky coast. From the tennis-courts of the Hôtel Bristol came the sharp "ping" of rackets striking white balls. The palms made a pleasant, crepitant murmuring. And Mr. Fothergill sat on a seat in the Beaulieu gardens where the stocks and the wallflowers smelt better than a perfume shop in the Rue de la Paix.

Yet Mr. Fothergill was depressed, more than depressed. He felt suicidal.

"What's the use of sunlight?"

Imagine the depth of his gloom! A little man in a grey suit and biscuit-coloured spats, dismissing the Mediterranean sun so slightingly; and this after months of rain and a summer that had degenerated into a splendour of slime and slugs!

"That doctor of mine was a fool."

He pulled his hat over his eyes, and stared at the silver-scaled sea. Someone was hoisting the sail of a small yacht, and a figure in a bright cerise jumper reminded Mr. Fothergill of the existence of artificial silk. He looked pathetic.

"There! It hits you everywhere. What's the use of sunlight if you can't leave your worries at home? Did that doctor of mine think I should leave them on the Channel boat — with — other things?"

He let himself sink deeper into pessimism.

"Tennis! He said I was to play tennis — and dance! Dashed fool. What did I come for? Waste of money."

John Fothergill had been at the Hôtel Metropole for more than a week. It was a gem of an hotel, all rose and gold, with the blue of the sea filling its windows, but Fothergill was a domesticated man, and he could not forget the wife and two girls left behind in Shacklesfield.

"Poor Molly! Poor Bertha and Jean! I'm a failure."

Someone else arrived to share the seat with him, and Fothergill recognized the rather pleasant and great-auntly person who sat at the next table in the *salle à manger* of the Metropole. They had exchanged confidences. They had praised or blamed the food, and held up hands of horror over the state of England!

"Isn't this lovely?"

Miss Ferguson was all smiles and white hair under a youthful rose-coloured hat.

"Too hot — almost," said Mr. Fothergill; feeling that it was his fate to disagree with anything and everything.

"Oh — no."

"It gives me a — excuse me — a liver. Rather sudden, after Shacklesfield."

"But contrasts are so good for one."

"That's what my doctor said. Unimaginative ass! Oh — I beg your pardon."

Miss Ferguson laughed.

"It takes one a week or two to get acclimatized."

"Does it? What about worry?"

"Worry?"

"Yes, worry. You can't get acclimatized to that. At least, I can't. Four years of it. Or rather, ever since the boom stopped. My business, you know."

Miss Ferguson had a sympathetic nature.

"Strikes, and all that, and foreign competition, and the exchanges, and the new fads — dead in three months."

"It must be very worrying."

"It's like going round and round in a whirlpool, wondering how long it will be before you are sucked down. I got giddy."

"I see. Overworked."

"No, over worried. I'm a serious fellow; I have a wife and children. One's business going to pot, you know, and your wife making herself smile. 'Your health is everything, John' — that's my wife. Said — she — would cut her allowance. I — was — to have a holiday — at all costs. A — holiday ——!"

He sat up straight and spread his hands like a Frenchman.

"Holiday! That confounded sun — regular Mark Tapley of a sun! Of all the offensive characters in fiction. And this last sum-

mer — all slush and slime, and nobody buying anything. A slump in sunlight. Suppose I've got a grievance."

It was obvious that he had.

"I'm sorry," said the lady in the rose-coloured hat; "one feels so helpless sometimes."

"One — is — helpless. That's just it."

For the next ten days John Fothergill's sense of helplessness continued. All the blueness of sea and sky, these flowers, this happy glare of sunlight, what were they but stage scenery? His tragedy was too real, too sordid, too commercially urgent. His thoughts reverted to Shacklesfield — with its muck and its cobbled streets, and its clogs. What did his health matter — anyway — if he had to go back to Shacklesfield and face bankruptcy?

The one active thing he did was to walk and to climb. He walked desperately, carrying an hotel lunch in a paper bag with a handle of red string, and poking the roads or the mule paths with a restless stick. He wore out his boots; but he did not wear out his worries.

But, by the grace of God, he was given an adventure.

He climbed to Eze. He had tea there at a café, and as he took the long mule-path that plunged down the hillside to the lower Corniche the setting sun flushed the Tête de Chien. It was a wonderful scene. Colour rushed to meet colour. It made John Fothergill think of Tree's staging of Stephen Phillips' *Ulysses*; he and Molly had seen the play on their honeymoon a hundred thousand years ago.

Wonderful days those! And what a comfortable country England had been then. Poor Molly! He paused in a sort of a dream, staring down at the lapis lazuli of the sea. So absorbed was he that he might have missed and passed by his adventure.

Someone was shouting.

Mr. Fothergill became aware of the shouting. It penetrated his mood of self-absorption, and he realized that the voice was a woman's, and that it was calling for help. It seemed to come from a group of scattered pines on a steep slope below the path.

"Hallo ——!"

"Is anything the matter ——?"

"Hallo! hallo! I'm here. Please be quick, will you."

A somewhat peremptory call from a person who appeared to be in distress, but Mr. Fothergill's soul leapt to the distraction, and he went in search of the owner of the voice. He found her half-seated and half-lying amid a jumble of rocks beyond the pines, one slim leg stretched out, a very graceful black leg.

"Have you hurt yourself?"

"Have I not?"

Mr. Fothergill stood and stared. The woman disconcerted him, for some instinct warned him that she belonged to that mysterious and notable world that suburbia glimpses in the illustrated papers. She was what was called a "striking-looking woman." Her hair was the colour of amber, and her eyes looked black in the glow of her face. She was tall. She wore an apple-green silk knitted dress, and white shoes, and a black hat.

Mr. Fothergill looked awkward and shy.

"Is it your ankle——?"

"Yes; I scrambled down to look at this view, and I twisted my foot between two rocks."

"Dear me——!"

The lady was much more emphatic. Dear me — indeed!

"My dear man, don't stand and stare. Help me back to the path——"

Mr. Fothergill hesitated.

"But ought you——?"

"Damn it; but I — must — get back to Monte in time for dinner. It's furiously important."

Obviously, and for some reason, it was, and her fierceness appeared to energize Mr. Fothergill.

"There is quite a lot of path left——"

"I know."

She held out a commanding hand.

"Come on. If you help me I expect I can hobble. Once down on the road——"

"A tram or a taxi."

"Just so."

"Or I can stop a car for you. Excuse me——"

As the Good Samaritan he was exceedingly polite. He raised his hat before presuming to stoop to that ministering embrace.

"Supposing you put one arm ——"

She had no fool self-consciousness."

"Obviously. Hold on."

Mr. Fothergill's left arm encircled her, and her right arm clasped his shoulders. Movement hurt her, but she had been hurt often in the hunting-field; she was determined. She encouraged him to drag her along.

"That's it."

"I'm afraid — it is hurting you."

"It is. Never mind. It's necessary ——"

Mr. Fothergill felt a glow of romantic admiration for her. Indeed — this was some adventure. He got her back to the mule-path and they began to descend, while the dusk threatened to make the descent still more difficult. Fothergill was a sturdy little man; there had been days when he had played a notable game as scrum-half for Shacklesfield.

"We are getting along."

"Splendid!" said she. "I'll do it."

"You've got some pluck. Excuse me saying so."

"I shall be — most damnably — in your debt."

"Oh, not at all. Lucky I turned up. By the way, where in Monte ——?"

"Oh — The Grand Hotel. My name's Mandeville."

And then Mr. Fothergill realized the uniqueness of the adventure.

"Lady Minerva?"

"That's me."

Domesticated creature though he was he thrilled. Lady Minerva Mandeville! That most illustrious and meteoric woman of the world! A romantic and a sensational figure — the goddess of fashion. And he — John Fothergill — had his arm around her waist, and she was leaning upon him!

His shyness returned.

"I feel quite important — your ladyship. Hallo, mind the stone ——"

"Dash the stone," said she; "the one important thing is that I should get back in time for dinner."

It took them three-quarters of an hour to reach the road, but reach it they did, and here Lady Minerva sat down on a bank and

said things under her breath. For her ankle felt like hot metal, and it was nearly dark, and she had smoked her last cigarette.

Mr. Fothergill was standing in the middle of the road, a dramatic and determined figure. He meant to stop the first car going in the direction of Monte Carlo.

"I say — Mr. ——"

"Fothergill ——"

"Got such a thing as a cigarette?"

"I have. Virginian?"

"Top-hole. Thanks — awfully. Hallo, there are the lights of a car."

"I'll stop it," said he, as though he were Horatius, planting himself in the middle of the road.

The lights blazed down on him, and he — waving his arms like a semaphore dared the callousness of a French chauffeur who pulled up suspiciously. Mr. Fothergill had no French; Lady Minerva supplied the language.

"What — Marquis — is it you? What luck! I've sprained my ankle — and I must get back ——"

A little fat man was being effusively sympathetic.

"How fortunate for me. Let me assist. Now, gently ——"

Mr. Fothergill was not to be effaced by a Marquis, though he did come from Shacklesfield, and his business was going to pot. He, too, assisted.

"Thanks awfully; awfully sweet of you both. Oh, Mr. Fothergill, I'm most tremendously grateful. Do come and lunch with me to-morrow ——"

Mr. Fothergill blushed in the darkness.

"I shall be delighted — your ladyship."

"Half-past twelve at The Grand. So long! You have been a regular mascot."

John Fothergill set out to tramp back to Beaulieu, thinking what a wonderful thing it was to have been a mascot to such a woman, and wishing that someone would play mascot to his poor, derelict business.

He turned up punctually next day at The Grand, a little nervous, and unsure about his tie. Would it be a formal and fashionable luncheon? A polite chasseur took his hat and coat, and conducted him to the lounge. Her ladyship was there, in a wheel chair,

and looking what the newspaper gentlemen call "radiant."

She received Mr. Fothergill with enthusiasm.

"Good morning, Mr. Mascot. Well, everything happened as I wanted it to happen, thanks to you. Now, what about the 'eats' — as they say in Main Street?"

Mr. Fothergill found himself lunching alone with Lady Minerva. It was an excellent lunch; they drank champagne, and she was kind and charming to him, for Mr. Fothergill made her think of a rather pathetic-looking little dog, a Pom that had lost its biscuit. He was worrying about something; he had a background of worry, and his troubled face looked out of it.

She made him talk, the champagne assisting, and he talked about himself.

"Out here for my health. Overworked — you know. I come from Shacklesfield. Has your ladyship ever visited Shacklesfield?"

No; Lady Minerva had missed that pleasure.

"Isn't that where the 'undies,' come from?"

"Some of them," said Mr. Fothergill coyly.

"The pretty-pretties. Of course."

He did not tell her of his business worries, but it is possible that she divined them.

The wonderful meal was over, and Lady Minerva's chair was wheeled into the lounge where, after coffee and cigarettes, Mr. Fothergill became so much part of the crowd that found it necessary to come and inquire about the great lady's ankle, that he politely and regretfully slipped away. But she threw a smile and a few admonishing words at him over the fat back of an American film-merchant.

"Now — don't worry — and come to see me again."

Mr. Fothergill returned to Beaulieu, and gloom descended on him once more, a natural reaction no doubt after that glimpse into what had seemed to him a carefree world. Also, the champagne may have had something to do with it. He told himself that he would never see Lady Minerva again.

But he did see her again, or rather she saw him, a most desperately depressed-looking little man, sitting on a seat in the Casino gardens. His face shocked her. She was in a bath-chair, and she ordered the man who was pushing it to stop.

"The poor little thing is going to gamble. People who sit there — looking like the Day of Judgment ——!"

Aloud, to the attendant — she said:

"Wheel me over to that seat where the gentleman in the grey suit is sitting, and then — go away for half an hour."

She surprised Mr. Fothergill. He looked confused, disconcerted, standing hat in hand.

"Naughty Fido!" she said, wagging a finger at him; "you haven't been to see me."

"Really — your ladyship, I did not want to presume ——"

"Presume! I owe you — ten thousand pounds — Mr. Mascot. And tell me — you were going into that place to gamble. Oh, yes, I saw it in your eyes. What we call retrieving our fortunes. Now, my dear Fido, sit down and tell me all about it."

"Why do you call me 'Fido'?"

"Oh, I always call people by the first name that comes into my head. Don't be offended, my dear man. Sit down and tell me all about it."

Mr. Fothergill was amazed at himself, but he did sit down, and he did tell her all about his tottering business, and about his wife and his two daughters.

Having listened with the sympathetic shrewdness of a woman of the world she asked him what exactly his business was.

"I'm a manufacturer."

"Yes; but what — exactly ——?"

"I make stocking and socks."

"Now — that's really very interesting. Can you manufacture silk stockings?"

"Most of my stockings are silk."

"My dear man, I must think this over. Come and lunch with me to-morrow. And don't go inside the Casino."

"I promise," he said.

How Lady Minerva's celebrations were to help his business Mr. Fothergill could not imagine; but she was a young woman of such supreme confidence and her confidence in herself had been so triumphant, that he became infected with a vague cheerfulness. At lunch next day she made him talk to her about the stocking trade, and after lunch, in a quiet corner of the lounge, she produced

a sheet of notepaper from her bag.

"Look at that."

Mr. Fothergill sat examining the drawing of a very graceful leg encased in stocking of black and of gold, the gold being in the shape of curved lance-shaped leaves winding delicately upwards.

"Ever seen anything like that — Fido?"

Mr. Fothergill had not.

"Could you manufacture stockings like that?"

Yes; he had no doubt that he could.

"Well — it's a novelty. Consider a moment. Supposing you rush home, could you turn out a pair of stockings like that in three weeks?"

He looked puzzled.

"I could — at a pinch."

"Right-o. Now listen. My doctor says that I ought not to walk for three weeks — if my ankle is to be like its fellow."

She laughed and gave a twitch of the skirts.

"Her ladyship has very ——"

"So everybody says, Mr. Fothergill. Now, listen; supposing when I make my first appearance on the Terrace — I am wearing a very original and taking pair of silk stockings? Your stockings. It's a silly world — but half the women in London appear to take an interest in what I wear. The Press knows it. The Press has an eye for my — audacities. So you see, very discreetly, I push my novelty in the way of stockings. Probably you might read:

"'Lady Mandeville was seen out for the first time. She was wearing — etc. — etc. — but the sensation was something very new and chic in silk stockings. We understand that these stockings were specially made for her by the well-known firm of Fothergill's of Shacklesfield.' D'you see?"

Mr. Fothergill did see.

"You really mean it?" he asked.

"Of course I do."

"You think you can launch a new rage?"

"Well, can't I? What about the Minerva scarf, and the Minerva corsets?"

"Your ladyship, I wasn't questioning you ——"

"Right, Fido; call the stocking the Minerva. Rush home and get

busy. Be ready to turn out the new idea by the thousand, and in other colours. I think there might be something in it."

Mr. Fothergill's dog-like eyes had grown bright.

"By jove, yes. A possible boom. With me weeks ahead. And what——?"

"And what——?"

"Your ladyship — naturally. I'm a business man——"

"Fudge," said she; "I owe you a good turn. Do you think I shan't enjoy it? Why — as the Yanks say — if the game comes off, I shall be tickled to death."

The very next day Molly Fothergill received a telegram:

"Returning at once.—JOHN."

And Mr. Fothergill was only a few hours behind the telegram. The holiday appeared to have done him an amazing amount of good. He kissed his wife like a lover.

"I've got an idea — a great idea. There's hope."

But he was mysteriously reticent as to the nature of the idea. He was concealing a possible triumph.

In three weeks Lady Mandeville had her stockings. She tried them on in front of her long mirror, and certainly — on her legs — the effect was delightful.

"H'm," she reflected, "in six months Kensington High Street and the Clapham Road may be full of this sort of thing. Such is fame!"

Nor had she miscalculated either her own importance or the suggestibility of the great public. Granted that her skirts were a trifle brief on the day that she wore Mr. Fothergill's stockings, and that her legs were — well — the legs of Lady Minerva Mandeville. Even a Scandanavian Prince fell to the flicker of the black and the gold. People asked questions.

"Where — did she get those stockings?"

Enterprising ladies connected with the Press came for interviews.

"Oh — these stockings? Rather ducks, aren't they. Yes; specially made for me by Fothergill's of Shacklesfield. What? Haven't heard of Fothergill's? Most nutty firm in the north."

She sent a telegram to Mr. Fothergill:

"Be ready. I think the disease is catching."

Meanwhile, Mr. Fothergill was cautiously and secretly manufac-

turing stockings. It was a gamble, but a safer gamble than roulette. He was buying every sort of illustrated paper, and all those very feminine journals, beginning with the *Bystander,* and ending with *Fashion Snippets.* And one day he saw the first gleam of those black-and-gold inspirations.

It spread. One paper produced a whole page photo of a leg sheathed in the new creation.

All the feminine tittle-tattle began to be full of stockings — silk hose. They crept into the gossipy "pars." Aunt Polly talked about them in *Mignonette.* A daily paper reproduced them on its woman's page. The Minerva Stocking, made by Fothergill's of Shacklesfield.

It was a boom.

Mr. Fothergill, in a state of strenuous hilarity, began to be smothered with inquiries, orders. He was turning out stockings, cataracts of stockings. He began to advertise on his own account.

"Wear the Minerva Stocking. Made by Fothergill's of Shacklesfield. Eve wore them in the Garden of Eden. That is why Adam ——"

He wrote letters of gratitude and exultation to Lady Minerva.

"We are being flooded; we can't make the things fast enough ——"

The only fly in the ointment was the rather enigmatic attitude of his wife.

"John — did you really — meet Lady Minerva?"

"Of course I did. I'll tell you all about it."

"And you made these stockings specially — to fit her leg ——?"

"Well — I should not have sent her out a misfit, my dear, should I?"

"John, did she give you one of her stockings — for a pattern?"

Mr. Fothergill held his breath. He was conscious of a moment of illumination.

"Of course. Do you think I measured ——?"

But, by Jove, what a dog he was! He had never suspected it. And here was the devoted Molly accusing him of doggishness. Life was worth living — after all.

Some time in the autumn Lady Minerva, piqued by curiosity, took a walk up Kensington High Street.

Every other leg or so advertised her fame.

Sappho

THE GIRL HAD COME RUNNING FROM WHERE THE GOATS WERE FEEDing on the hillside, and at the gateway in the rude stone wall of the farm she paused and stood for a moment at gaze. She was out of breath, a long, dark, wild creature, bare-footed, her unstockinged legs showing red scratches where the scrub upon the hillside had left its marks upon her.

"Mother, mother, a boat!"

The slimness of her shadow fell projected upon the flattened boulders of the path, and here another shadow joined it, rotund, immense, the sun-shaped outline of Kyria Anna Zapta, lady of Leros. She, too, stood and stared with her coffee-coloured eyes, her red apron bulging, her feet well apart.

Kyria Anna's greeting of the unexpected took the sound of a grunt.

"A boat."

It was passing between the grey and rocky horns of the inlet below them, a white bird of a boat, gliding under jib and mainsail, with a figure in a white sweater seated in the well behind the cabin. It forged into the blue-green circle of the little bay, and coming up into the wind, lay with sails flapping. The white figure became busy with the tackle. The white wings fell. The boat lay there in the calm blueness, with two portholes of its little cabin blinking.

"The sea sends us a stranger," said the big woman.

Sappho — her daughter — was leaning a shoulder against the stone wall, one bare foot curved over the instep of the other.

"Who will it be? A strange boat."

Her mother, swarthy and laconic, with two deep grooves framing her broad nose, and her large eyes ominously shrewd, watched the boat and its solitary occupant. He had stowed the sails, and was standing up and looking towards the green cleft of the valley in which the Zapta farm stood solitary and white. It was the only

inhabited building on the island, and the Zaptas were its only inhabitants, the mother, the daughter and the three sons. Once a month or so a caique would come across from Zante, to unload and to load what Leros had to give and to take.

"He is going to land," said the girl.

Her dark eyes showed a flickering excitement. The man in the boat had got out two sculls, and standing up like an Italian, was propelling the little yacht towards the rocky jetty where Yannie Zapta's boat lay moored.

"He has fair hair," said the girl, with a sudden suggestion of breathlessness.

Kyria Anna drew a broad hand across her mouth.

"A Frank. I saw them in the old days. English."

Her swelling, yellow eyelids seemed to close over her coffee-coloured eyes until the irises were no more than two brown slits. She had a watchful, calculating air. In her the hard cunning of the eternal peasant stood at gaze. Life was a shrewd business; the hoarding of gold coins in a hole under Mother Zapta's immense bed.

The stranger had moored his boat to the jetty. They saw him standing there, looking boyish and tall, his eyes taking in all that part of Leros that was visible to him, the grassy valley, the patches of corn, the scattered olive trees, the grey hills streaked with yellow lichen, the farm with its three cypresses, the outline of the old Venetian tower rising on a ridge against the blue of the sky. He began to stroll up towards the farm, his hands in his trousers pockets, his eyes at gaze, searching the valley like the eyes of a lover.

"He has come ashore for water," said the mother.

"We can give him water."

"We can sell him water. Water is scarce in the islands."

They stood and waited. The three sons of Anna Zapta were at work in the vineyard beyond the hill, and the stranger was greeted by the two women, the laconic and massive mother and the quick-eyed girl. He had fair hair, a smooth chin, and blue eyes that smiled and looked into the distance and smiled again, and he stood there easily, his hands resting on his hips.

"Many days to you, lady. I am a traveller — a sailor; I came in a boat — as you see. I visit the islands — your island."

He smiled at the girl who was watching him, all eyes for his newness, his strangeness. She looked at his clothes, his hair, his skin, his string-soled shoes. He had spoken to them in the pure Greek, and to the Zapta women the pureness of the tongue sounded strange, for in Leros they spoke the demotic.

"English?"

Kyria Anna's deep voice was like the grasp of a hand drawing his attention from her daughter to herself.

"English — yes. I visit the islands in my boat. I wish to stay in Leros a few days. I ask your permission."

The Greek woman nodded.

"I have a tent — you understand? If I may put it up under the shades of one of the poplars beside the stream? Greek earth under one's feet! A change from the sea. And the lady will perhaps let me buy vegetables — and eggs?"

Again Anna Zapta nodded.

"As you wish," she said.

An hour later they saw him pitching a little tent by one of the poplars beside the stream. Demetrios, the eldest of the three Zapta brothers, happening to return to the farmhouse, found the girl and the woman watching something over the top of the yard wall. The white tent and its owner had been hidden from the Greek by the buildings of the farm. He, too, called upon to gaze and to listen, hung a morose black beard over the stones, and contemplated this stranger. Demetrios resembled his mother; he had the same huge frame, and the same coffee-coloured eyes, and in the son the mother's harshness had repeated itself in the form of a fanged truculence.

Anna Zapta sent the girl away to cut up vegetables for the evening meal. There are some things that are better kept away from a girl's ears, and Kyria Anna's interest lay in knowing why the man had come here. She was not one who believed in motionless pilgrimages.

"These English may be strange fools."

"But it will be easy," said her son, "to go down and ask him."

His mother emitted one of those expressive grunts.

"Easy. Yes; and if he has a reason, he is less likely to tell it to you. A man does not sail to Leros without a reason."

Demetrios meditated.

"I will go down and speak to him."

"Ask him to sup with us," said his mother. "And do not forget to smile."

But the Englishman was better at smiling than were the Zaptas, for at this season of his life he was doing just that which his heart had always yearned to do, and the man who accomplishes his desire smiles easily. Demetrios found him erecting a camp-bed. They exchanged courtesies, and Demetrios accepted a cigarette. He stood in the opening of the little tent, in his baggy white breeches and red sash, smiling whenever the Englishman looked at him, but in the intervals between his smiles the Greek's face seemed covered by a swarthy shadow.

All Greeks are inquisitive, and Rupert Merrow had nothing to hide. He talked to Demetrios as though Demetrios had a right to know why he had come to Leros.

"I am a sailor's son, and a scholar."

"Ah — a scholar."

"A Greek scholar. It had always been my dream to come and sail among the islands, Delos, Naxos, to visit the homes of your ancestors, Kyr Zapta. Sometimes a man's dreams come true."

Demetrios smiled.

"That's so."

"For five years I was a schoolmaster."

"A schoolmaster."

"And then — someone — left me a little money."

"Money is very useful."

"And here I am."

Just when the sky had begun to grow yellow above the hills of Leros and the sea had turned to violet, Rupert Merrow strolled up to the farm. The Zaptas greeted him with swarthy ceremony. In the kitchen where strings of dried vegetables hung from the beams, and ikons glimmered dimly on the walls, Kyria Zapta sat at the end of a table of Spanish mahogany. Yannie and Christobulos, her two other sons, stood behind her and smiled. Sappho, the girl, perched on a stool, watched the Englishman with Delphic eyes.

Merrow felt at home with these people, for were they not Greeks, his Greeks, the beloved children of his beloved ancients. He saw in

them a stateliness, a dignity, much that he wished to see. He talked like an eager boy; he had no guile, and he sensed no guile in the eyes of these tall islanders. To him Anna Zapta was the lady of Leros, a swarthy Penelope, a little vast in her majesty, no doubt, but the mother of Greek children.

Merrow told them why he had come to Leros.

"To see the place where your great temple stood, the temple of the Lady of the Myrtles."

They did not understand him. He had to explain that he was speaking of the temple of the Lerine Venus, that famous, white-pillared shrine that had glimmered in the green valley above the sea.

"The books tell me that some of the stones are still to be seen."

Demetrios, at the end of the table, exchanged a stare with his mother.

"Yes, there are stones," he said guardedly.

His mother was peeling an orange.

"Some of the stones were built into this house."

Sappho, on her stool, her feet thrust into a pair of red Turkish slippers, ate her supper, and fed upon the stranger's words. It was evident that he puzzled her, as all new maleness must puzzle the incipient woman, and her wide eyes envisaged the fairness of him, something glowing both of spirit and of face. He was so different from these brothers of hers, and from the dark-chinned men who came from Zante, men who looked as though their thoughts had to be hidden. She contrasted their obscure, dark, inward faces with the face of this northerner, the face of the eternal dreamer, of the immortal and questioning boy. She was too young to understand the upward winging of her wonder, though she was very conscious of this wonder.

Merrow had risen and was wishing them good night.

"My tent is very small," he was saying, "but if the Lady of Leros will lend me her kitchen I will return her her welcome."

He went out into the night where a full moon hung poised over the sea. The girl had made a quick movement and from the doorway she had watched him cross the little courtyard. The room was silent behind her, and feeling its silence she turned to see her three brothers standing by the table looking at their mother,

for it was from Anna Zapta that the silence had spread. She was the core and the cause of it, sitting there huge and thoughtful in her chair, like some doom figure brooding upon its own inevitableness.

Sappho shrank against the wall. She felt a sudden fear of her mother; why, she did not know.

Anna Zapta's eyes rose slowly to the face of her firstborn. She made a pointing movement with her hand, and Demetrios understood her. They had the same thoughts.

Demetrios went out into the night, and there for Sappho the action of the evening ended. A wave of her mother's large and yellow hand sent her to her little room above the kitchen, and she lay there listening for voices; but there were no voices. She heard Yannie and Christobulos go to the room above the stable, and after that there was more silence. Later, when she was on the edge of drowsiness, she heard voices, and knew that Demetrios had returned. He and Anna Zapta were talking. The murmur of their talk was vague and distant.

"I followed him," the son was saying; "he did not go to his tent, but wandered up the valley. The moonlight is very bright; I had to be careful. He kept walking round and round where those white stones lie. He sat on one of the stones, and talked."

"He talked? With nobody there?"

Demetrios nodded.

"It was like a man putting a spell. He held out a hand to the moon. Presently he went away to his tent, and lit a light there. I saw his shadow. When the light went out I crept down to his boat. He had left the doors of the cabin unfastened."

His mother listened with vast immobility.

"You searched."

"There was nothing — nothing to show."

She looked slantwise along the table.

"We must find out. A man does not come to look at old stones. He has heard of the secret; some sailor man has told him. These scholars — cunning people ——"

Demetrios' face showed a vague smile.

"The hoard of Dandolo," he said. "But if we have searched, and our fathers before us ——"

"He has heard of it," said Anna Zapta. "Perhaps the secret of it was to be found in some old book. We must watch."

So the game began, for it was not to be believed that a man would sail hundreds of miles in a little white boat just to look at a few old stones on an island. The Zaptas were hard people with gnarled souls. For generations they had torn sustenance from this rocky island; they had suffered the rule of the Turk; life had been grim and careful and secretive. The Englishman's story was absurd. They had no doubt but that he had heard this Monte Cristo legend, and that he had been lured to Leros by the story of that Venetian hoard buried somewhere. But where? Sundry generations of Zaptas had asked that question and had tried to answer it. They believed in the legend; they had dug and burrowed, delving deep into the cellar of the old Venetian watch-tower. They had hoarded this mysterious and unsolved secret; it belonged to them.

"We must watch. We must find out how much he knows, and what he knows."

Anna Zapta had spoken.

Merrow, the enthusiast, the dreamer, was like a child in the midst of their imaginings. The sun shone, the sea was blue, and between the grey knees of the hills lay the valley where the Venus of Leros had smiled upon her worshippers. The stones were there, sunk in the soil, looking like the backs of couchant sheep. His enthusiasm began with a swim in the sea, and breakfast under the shade of the poplar. Then he would get to work with measuring tape and notebook and the eyes of the scholar, tracing out the foundations of the temple of the Lady of the Myrtles.

He was watched. And what could be more suspicious than these careful activities, these measurings and scribblings? Even his pocket-book was suspect.

Yet he was to win a disciple.

The girl, leaving her goats, or her work about the house or in the garden or vineyard, would come gliding on those long legs of hers, velvet-eyed, hair loose, a veritable Œnone.

The Englishman was a strange creature, mercurial, blue-eyed, incredibly appealing. He smiled at her; he talked. He would let her stand behind him while he sat on one of the old worn stones and drew things in his notebook.

"What do you do, Englishman?"

She was a Greek girl, and he accepted her as a fellow enthusiast. The temple of the Venus of the Myrtles! He pictured it to her, its white marble pillars, its light and soaring architrave, the gleaming steps, the forecourt, the groves of cypresses, the mysterious violet-coloured gloom with its portals. And she saw it, its beauty, its symbolical mystery. She saw it in him, and heard it in his voice. He convinced her. He was not like the men — her brothers.

It became a magic game between them. She joined in the dream building of a thing that was dead. She held one end of the measuring tape, and ran about with quick and eager movements, uttering little cries, or looked over his shoulder, and pointed with a slim brown finger, and sparkled, and made sudden discoveries, and was full of quick colour under her olive skin. In three days she knew as much as he did, or all that he knew of the dead temple.

"We must dig," she said.

"Yes; we must dig."

It was she who ran up to the farm for a mattock and a long-handled spade, and Anna Zapta, listening with half-closed eyes, put no refusal in the path of the adventure.

"Ah! he wants to dig?"

"Yes; to find the old stones that are buried."

"Very good," said the mother; "let him dig."

When Sappho had gone to bed Kyria Zapta and her sons held council together. They were angry with the Englishman, for it seemed to them that he was treating them as very simple people, fools who would believe anything, and of course all this digging of his appeared the most insolent make-believe. He was using the girl — their sister, telling her fairy tales. Obviously he had some knowledge that was not theirs, and he had trumped up a pretty story to excuse his playing about with mattock and shovel. He would go on telling Sappho fairy tales, and one night he would dig up something and be off like a thief in that white boat.

"We must find out," said Anna Zapta.

She stroked a broad nose with a thoughtful finger.

"These English talk easily when they are full of wine. I remember — in the old days. He shall come here and drink wine."

So it was planned; but Anna Zapta's Greek wine failed to loosen

Merrow's tongue or to make a babbling and boastful fool of him, for the Englishman was no wine-drinker. The filled glass, sipped at occasionally, remained at his elbow. But he talked, and he talked like a young Homer, while Anna Zapta silently raged.

Obviously, the fellow was cunning.

"Set the girl on him," said Demetrios with one swarthy, sidelong glance at his mother, when Merrow had gone to his tent.

Anna Zapta's face became a thunder-cloud.

"What are you saying? My girl is no——"

Demetrios shrugged.

"No; not that. There are different keys to different men's hearts. The wine will not open him. But some men can be fooled——"

They talked it over, bending forward over the table and looking into each other's eyes. Demetrios had his say. Some men were soft about women, and though Sappho was little more than a child, the fellow seemed taken with her.

Sappho was fetched out of bed, and made to stand in that grim family circle, listened wide-eyed to the monstrous accusation. Her Englishman was a thief, a cunning fellow who had come to rob poor people, and to dig in the soil and carry away their treasure.

She would not believe it.

But when those intent and greedy faces drew closer about her, and she felt the menace of their anger, and was made to grasp the part she was to play, she grew suddenly and strangely silent. She nodded; she acquiesced. Like a wild thing she was aware of the danger, but she hid her knowledge of it, dissembling, even smiling, while the soul of her fluttered.

"Yes; I will try."

They made her dress herself next morning in a milk white petticoat and red jacket, with a green sash about her slimness.

"You shall say it is your name-day."

They gave her red leather shoes and gold earrings.

"Somewhere there is treasure hidden. Make him tell you. One of us will be watching."

Merrow, sitting on the stones of a foundation wall they had uncovered, with a pipe stuck on the corner of his mouth, and his notebook beside him, saw this gay figure descending. She came quickly, and yet with an air of unwillingness; she had ceased to be the

Sappho of yesterday, the fellow-playmate. Her eyes avoided him; she stood there staring into the open trench.

He held his pipe in his hand and smiled.

"What is this? A birthday?"

She raised the two corners of a white apron edged with blue embroidery, and suddenly her impulse had its way.

"They are saying that there is treasure here, and that you have come to take it away from us. They say that you must know where it is hidden."

Her eyes held his.

"You would not tell me a lie. I do not believe it. But they are angry——"

His inclination had been to laugh, but her eyes were not for laughter. He looked at those gay clothes of hers, and at the figure of her flowering with southern significance.

"Treasure, Sappho? What do they mean?"

"The treasure of the Venetians, hidden here somewhere years and years ago."

"I know nothing of it. And they think——?"

"Yes."

Her dark eyes hid something of shame, and her shame was an appeal.

"I swear to you, Sappho, that I know nothing of this treasure."

"You need not swear to me," she said quickly. "What you say—I believe."

He put out a hand, but she stood there, sullen and troubled, struggling with words that were hard to utter.

"But—Kyr Merrow—will they believe——? You see, life is hard here, and money does not come easily. And I am afraid. Oh, go away; go away quickly."

He climbed out of the trench and stood beside her.

"Oh, but they will believe. I have nothing to fear."

But she was afraid, and behind her fear were the swarthy faces of her mother and her brothers. She sat down on one of the stones and pleaded with Merrow, showing a sensitiveness that surprised him. She pleaded both for them and for him, understanding their grudging suspicions and Merrow's lack of seriousness in meeting their suspicion. They would not believe his story, and he could

not believe theirs.

The child in her seemed to become aware of the double involvement. She jumped up, and putting her hands upon his shoulders, pushed him gently from her.

"Please — please go away."

Her earnestness troubled him.

"Well — perhaps — to-morrow."

"You promise?"

"I will think it over," he said.

But she would not leave him until he had given her a half promise that he would embark his tent and his belongings in the white boat very early next morning, and sail away from Leros.

"For," as she said to him, "we and you are strangers. You came here, and they do not understand. I — understand — but they do not. Nor can you understand the suspicions in their hearts. You and they are strangers."

He tried to smile it off, and to convince himself that he had no cause to feel mortified because his Greeks were not the Greeks of his scholar's dream.

"If my being here casts a shadow," he said, "then I will go."

She folded her hands over her bosom and looked at him with dark and immense self-questioning.

"I will go and tell them. What shall I tell them? It must be a lie. They must think ——"

And then she left him, slowly climbing the hillside towards the farm, while Rupert Merrow sat down and smoked a pipe over this problem of the peasant mind. These Zaptas could not believe that a lone man could come to an island, following the light that was in him, but they must needs seek a material purpose, seeing their own narrow greed in the eyes of a stranger.

The truth depressed him, and more than it should have done, for he was one of those men who like to believe people to be better than they are.

"It's absurd," he said to himself; "I'll stay here and see it out. To run away from such a silly fable! To-morrow — perhaps — I will go and talk to that old woman."

Yet the Zapta mind was to be more previous than the scholar's, and more quick in action. That night one of the brothers lay across

Sappho's door, listening for any sound from her, while the others spoke their minds.

"It is better to be sure. If he knows anything — he must share it with us."

The mother, with hands folded over her obese implacability, nodded a ruthless head.

"Let it be done. There will be no boat from Zante for many days. We will say ——"

So, by the light of the moon the three brothers went down to the little bay, and unmooring Merrow's boat, unshipped the mast and sunk the boat in deepish water. They swam ashore, and crept up cautiously to the silent tent where the Englishman lay sleeping.

When Sappho opened the shutter and looked out of her window she saw that the white tent had disappeared, and that Merrow's boat no longer lay beside Yannie's caique.

"He has gone," was the cry of her heart; "he has kept his promise."

She was both glad and sorry; she put on her old clothes and went down to the day's work as though nothing had happened, and she pretended to a surprise that hid secret thoughts.

"What, he has gone?"

Her mother had the air of a woman who was not in a temper to be spoken to.

"Yes; and he owes us for a string of onions and six eggs. To sneak away in the night — like that!"

Her face expressed disgusted scorn.

But Anna Zapta was an autocrat, and whatever the mood was that possessed her, she gave way to it, and all the population of Leros bowed the knee, and on the day after the Englishman's disappearance she appeared to be consumed by a fever of activity. The burden of it was laid upon Sappho's shoulders. There came the sudden announcement that the whole house was a pigsty, and from the early meal until sunset Sappho toiled and swept and washed, and carried in clean water and carried it out dirty. Anna Zapta was relentless when these restless moods were upon her.

Not till sunset was the girl able to escape from the house, and even then she was watched by Christobulos who sat and smoked upon the yard wall. She went down the hill to the poplar tree,

and let the first sadness of her youth spend itself in the blue dusk. She looked at his stones, at the hollows in the valley where they had played that game of rebuilding a dream past.

"It is just like a dream," she thought. "He came, and he has gone; and my heart is heavy."

Two days passed, and Anna Zapta's passion for cleanliness continued, but on the third night a strange and secret restlessness attacked the girl. She had a feeling that something was happening, something that she could neither hear nor see. Her mother was strange, tempestuous, yet sullen. And Demetrios would sit all hunched up at his meals, gnawing his bread with those long teeth of his.

Moreover, she had seen Demetrios — or a figure that was like her eldest brother's — outlined against the dawn on the ridge where the tower of the Venetians stood. No one ever went there. She had wondered why Demetrios was there.

Such was her restlessness, her intuitive dread of some unknown horror, that she slipped out of her window that third night, and stepping with bare feet on the tiled roof of the pent-house below it, let herself down to the ground. A waning moon was coming up over the sea. She was full of tremors of fear and of nameless excitement. She ran and yet held her breath, climbing through the rough scrub towards the black and squat outline of the ruined tower. It was as though it held something — had a dark and silent mouth that tried to utter a cry of distress.

She was close to the tower, under the bulky shadow of it, when she heard a cry, a faint sound like the cry of someone entombed. Her heart seemed to leap to her mouth. Shivering, she slipped in through the broken doorway, and stood leaning against the wall, the roofless circle above her showing the stars.

Had she imagined that sound?

But no; it came to her again.

"Sappho — Sappho — water."

In an instant she understood, and understood with horror and tumult and a hurrying tenderness. An old wooden trap-door covered the entrance to the cellar-pit below the floor. She groped and found it, and found it covered with a pile of heavy stones.

Panting, she rolled them away. She fought the door with her

thin brown fingers, and with torn finger nails, swung it back and up.

"Is it you?"

His voice came in a dry whisper:

"Sappho — water ——"

She brought him water in an earthenware pot, but to descend to him she had to make a second journey to the farm for a rough ladder that hung under the eaves of one of the outhouses. Meanwhile, her terror became a thing of horror and of tenderness. Merrow was very weak. For two days he had had neither food nor water, and she had to support his shoulders while he drank, and in that dark pit their bodies and breath were mingled. She learnt the truth from him. Her brothers had cast him into the pit, and each night he had had the same words thrown down to him:

"Tell us the secret and we will give you water."

"My Virgin!" she cried, and held his head against her shoulder; "and they are my brothers!"

But she was strong, and she got him up the ladder and down the hillside to the stone jetty where Yannie's boat lay moored. A dog had begun to bark up at the farm, and in that moment of terror she realized that Merrow was too weak to save himself. He lay there in the bottom of the caique, incapable of hoisting a sail or of pulling at a sweep.

She cast off the moorings, and with a brown foot thrusting against the stones, she scrambled over the gunwale as the caique slid away from the jetty, while Merrow lay there watching her. She got out the light sweeps, and urged the boat slowly towards the open sea. On the island someone was shouting.

Clear of the bay she shipped the sweeps, and went to the sail, but she was not strong enough to hoist it.

"Help. They are coming. They can swim."

Merrow, struggling to his knees, got hold of the tackle, and adding his weight to hers, they managed to hoist the sail. A light breeze caught it, and Sappho, scrambling over Merrow to the tiller, gave the caique the wind.

"It is over," she said, and choking suddenly, wept as she held the boat's head from the island, the exile of circumstance.

Merrow listened to the sound of her weeping, and the prattle of the water against the planks. A stupor descended upon him; he

was no more than a child in a cradle, while she — the sudden woman, held to her course. And presently, Merrow fell asleep.

It was daylight when he woke. He was lying in the bottom of the boat, with his head on a coil of rope and turned towards the boat's bow. Sappho was at the tiller, standing, her eyes looking westwards over the purple sea. And behind her the sun was rising, a great knot of cerise in the midst of a blue-black cloud.

"Sappho?"

Her eyes fixed themselves on him suddenly.

"I can never go back again — never."

And Merrow, watching the sun shake himself free of the flat cloud, knew that what she had said was true.

The Black Cat

He stood in the vestibule of the Hôtel de Provence while the blue-coated concierge signalled for a taxi. Of medium height, dressed in black, with a cigar tucked between his full red lips, he had the air of a man who enjoyed life, and who enjoyed it with suave ferocity. His little black beard was cut to a point. He wore a soft collar, a big black tie, and a large-brimmed soft hat. His boots were of patent leather. He looked the musician or the artist.

The concierge returned through the swing doors.

"The taxi, monsieur."

He held back one of the leaves of the door and watched the man in the soft hat cross the pavement. The man's name was Muller — at least that was the name in the hotel register — and his French was not the French of a native. The concierge observed him; for it was part of his business to observe people, and his pleasure was to make inward comments upon them.

"A fellow who enjoys life. Fond of women. Plenty of money. Purrs like a cat."

Monsieur Muller was speaking to the taxi-driver.

"The bureau of the *Compagnie Transatlantique*."

"*Bien*, monsieur."

The taxi rattled down the Cannebière towards the old port, and Muller sat smoking his cigar and watching the crowd. His eyes dwelt principally upon the women. It was obvious that he was a connoisseur. His red lips were appreciative, and when he smiled his sharp white teeth made his lips look more red. As the artist — or the musician — and the man of pleasure he tasted life delicately, and with success. He smiled; he was well fed; but there were moments when his red mouth and his glassy brown eyes were cruel. The taxi passed the Fort St. Jean, and the broad sky opened above the Bassin de la Joliette. Masts and funnels showed. Casks and sacks

and cases were piled in the sheds; rough-looking men lounged and spat. The taxi drew up outside the offices of the *Compagnie Transatlantique*, and Monsieur Muller alighted.

The footwalk had become a temporary camping ground for a complex crowd of Arabs, Maltese, Negroes, Corsicans, and people of mixed colour, who had either arrived or were awaiting departure, and when Mr. Muller had dismissed his taxi, he had to find a passage through this assortment of humans who sprawled or squatted, with their nondescript luggage scattered about them. There were women in the crowd, and children, and Mr. Muller showed his good nature by chucking a small child under the chin, and by smiling upon its parents. The people made way for him. He walked softly and politely like a sleek black cat.

Leaning against the wall was a tall man dressed in the dirty clothes of a coal-porter. He had a knife in one hand and a raw onion in the other, and he was cutting slices from the onion and slipping them into his mouth. His hair and beard were grey, and yet he was a youngish man who looked as though he had been frosted before his time.

Muller was emerging from the crowd when the coal-porter happened to raise his eyes, and the slice that he had cut from the onion remained poised upon the blade of the knife. His blue eyes stared. They looked like two hard circles of stone. He remained absolutely still, with the onion slice balanced upon the blade of the knife.

Muller was not conscious of the man's stare. He was moving towards the main doorway, and he disappeared into the vestibule. The man with the onion made a quick, gliding movement along the wall, and saw Muller pushing open the glass door of the office. There were a number of people strung along the counter, waiting to buy tickets or to make inquiries as to the boat-sailings, and Muller took his place at the counter, and leaning easily against it, glanced at some of the pamphlets and advertisements that were displayed there.

The man with the onion had disappeared. He was running across the road in the direction of a lorry that had unloaded a pile of cases outside one of the sheds. A group of stevedores had gathered behind the lorry; they were arguing and making a great deal of noise. A slightly-built man with melancholy eyes and a pale face was leaning

against the lorry, smoking a cigarette.

The man with the onion called to him and made a sign.

"Gorouki ——"

The melancholy eyes expressed surprise. He moved languidly in the direction of the coal-porter, who stood waiting with an air of suppressed fierceness.

"What's the trouble, Saratoff? Seen a ghost?"

The man with the onion uttered two words.

"Petrovsky — Ginkelstein."

They had an extraordinary effect upon Gorouki. His melancholy eyes seemed to fill with red light; his languor disappeared; the whole of him seemed to stiffen.

"What are you saying ——?"

Saratoff pointed with his knife.

"Over there in the office. Sure of it. His white rubber face and red mouth. Come and look ——"

They went — these two — Saratoff, tall and lined and grey, and with eyes that seemed to stare at something that was a long way off; and Gorouki, fragile and fierce and trembling — and they stood among those Mediterranean people upon the pavement, and watched the doorway of the *Compagnie Transatlantique*. Gorouki was shaking. Saratoff kept a hand on his arm.

"Be careful, little mouse."

Gorouki made a noise in his throat.

"Mouse! Yes; and does he still slide about like a sleek black cat? You — remember?"

The big man's fingers tightened on his arm.

"Yes; that was a filthy night. He sat there and purred. Look ——!"

Muller had reappeared. He stood for a moment on the step examining a steamer ticket. He smiled as he slipped it into a wallet, and replaced the wallet in his pocket. He did not see the two men.

Saratoff was holding Gorouki by the arm.

"Quiet, Paul."

Gorouki's eyes were red.

"Lend me your knife."

Saratoff restrained him.

"Not so fast. We did not expect such luck to come to us, did we? And just to use a knife is too easy. Besides, it is my knife."

"You are afraid?"

"Hardly. Don't you remember how often we have sat and discussed what we would like to do to that evil beast? And here he is. A miracle!"

Muller, alias Petrovsky, alias Ginkelstein, was walking away along the quay in the direction of Fort St. Jean.

"We shall lose him."

"I think not. Did you not see that ticket, and the colour? Let us enjoy ourselves."

Saratoff's deliberation was far more grim than Gorouki's febrile ferocity, and as they followed Ginkelstein along the Quay de la Joliette, a light came into the tall man's grey-blue eyes. He walked with a long-limbed jauntiness, holding Gorouki above the elbow; Ginkelstein was strolling, very much at his leisure; he paused to light another cigar.

Saratoff swung his friend round and made a show of being interested in a ship lying in the Bassin.

"He will be staying at an hotel. We will follow him there. He will dine. It is possible that he will stroll out to sit at a café and to look at the women. We shall be there. But we must be very careful; we must not waste this God-sent opportunity."

"Saratoff," said the little man, "if you will lend me your knife — I will do it now."

"Not so fast. There is a time and a place for everything. Besides — why should we have to pay up? We are going to collect a debt, and no one need know about it."

They followed Ginkelstein along the Quay de la Port, and up the Cannebière to the Cours Belsunce. The imagined smell of Ginkelstein's cigar drifted back to provoke them; he was the comfortable lounger, looking in the faces of the women, or dawdling by shop windows. The two friends had to be very careful in the crowded streets, for if Saratoff and Gorouki had recognized Ginkelstein, Ginkelstein might recognize Gorouki and Saratoff.

"But it is not very likely," said the tall man. "Who would imagine us here, carrying coal and cement; two *aristos* — ex-officers? Our friend is more interested in the women. Have you noticed it?"

Again Gorouki made that noise in his throat.

"Yes; and on that night — it was our women, my friend. Our

helpless women. And we were trussed up. I wish you would give me that knife."

"My child, that would be too easy for Ginkelstein. Does one gulp down choice wine?"

They shadowed the suave, black Bohemian figure to the Hôtel de Provence, and they saw the blue-coated concierge open the door to it. Saratoff looked up at the windows of the hotel and at the great gilded letters of its name, and then he glanced humourously at his own rough, coal-grimed hands.

"The hands of a worker, Paul! What rot! And that little fat friend of the poor has the soft hands of a parasite! What is he doing in Marseilles? Why is he going to Algiers?"

Gorouki was staring like a starved man at the hotel doorway.

"Does it matter? The only thing that matters — is — that I shall tear his throat out to-night."

Saratoff caught the little man by the arm and swung him round.

"Come, a little drink; we must get on the other side of the street. That café. Now, I want to ask you a question."

"Ask away."

"Do you like to gulp down good wine, or sit and sip it, and let it trickle down slowly?"

"I want to make sure of my wine," said the little man grimly.

"Yes; yes; so do I. But, I tell you, I mean to enjoy it."

But the procuring of the rich red wine of their revenge was not to be the simple matter that it appeared to Paul Gorouki. Here were they, a couple of exiles, common toilers in this Mediterranean port, while the notorious Ginkelstein — alias Petrovsky — alias Muller, was well sheltered behind the plunder that he — like other of his ilk — had taken care to transfer to other countries. Muller put on a starched shirt, and dined *à la carte* at the Hôtel de Provence, while the two exiles skulked in the street and watched the door of the hotel. They watched it in vain, for it is possible that the suave Muller preferred to remain in the hotel after dark, for Marseilles can be a wicked city.

It grew cold, for the mistral was blowing, and the two Russians were thinly clad. Gorouki began to cough, but if the wind blew through him, his eyes remained two furnaces of hate.

"I shall stay here all night."

Big Saratoff would not hear of it.

"No, my friend. Besides, the police might begin to take notice. Obviously, he is not coming out. By the way, how much money have we?"

Gorouki kept the firm's books.

"About thirty francs. Why?"

"Because we may have to go to Algiers. It would do you good, my little Paul, and the Black Cat's affairs interest me. To-morrow, he will drive straight to the quay, and go on board the *General Chanzy*. We too must sail on the *General Chanzy*. I shall have to sell that ring."

He put his arm across Gorouki's shoulders and walked him down the street, but this little hater with the melancholy eyes was loth to leave his watch upon the hotel that sheltered the murderer of children and women.

"That butcher may not be going to Algiers. He may be going to Paris, or Rome."

"I tell you I saw his ticket, and I ought to know a boat ticket when I see it. You will go to bed, and at dawn I shall be out here on the watch, while you go and raise money on the ring. It is a good thing we kept it — for some great occasion."

"It will be a very great occasion," said Gorouki with terrible simplicity.

The *General Chanzy* sailed for Marseilles at noon. It was a blue day with a north wind blowing gently. The golden figure of Nôtre Dame de la Garde glittered against the azure north, and upon the grey Château d'If the sun shone as though that grim island had no memories. The first-class passengers were at lunch in the saloon, and on the main deck among the riff-raff of all colours, Saratoff and Gorouki gnawed dry bread. But the third-class passengers could look into the windows of the saloon, though they were shut out like beggars in a street, and Saratoff peered in through one of the windows.

He beckoned to Gorouki.

Ginkelstein was at one of the tables. They saw him in profile, a napkin tucked into his collar, and a bottle of choice wine before him. They watched the movements of his jaw and of his full red lips. He was enjoying his meal; he looked sleek and complacent; his

voracity was smiling and bland.

"Why does he go to Algiers?" murmured Gorouki, with eyes of fierce desire.

"We shall see. I managed to get a glimpse of his luggage. His name is Muller these days."

"And what was the address?"

"Muller — Algiers. That was all."

They had a rough passage, and both Saratoff and his friend lay about on deck with that African crowd, dolorously sick; but Mr. Muller enjoyed himself on the boat promenade. He smoked his cigars, and went in to his meals; he was like white rubber, and he had no qualms. He was as superior to sea-sickness as he had been superior to pity during the days of the terror.

At Algiers the sun shone on the white houses, and the sea was very blue, but Gorouki was the colour of a lemon, even when the *General Chanzy* was roped up beside the quay. The crowd poured down the gangway to merge into that other many-coloured crowd thronging under the high walls of the harbour. Saratoff ploughed through alone towards a space where hotel buses and motor-cars were picking up the wealthy. He knew Ginkelsein by his big, broad-brimmed black hat, and his spreading tie. An Arab porter was loading luggage into a taxi, and Mr. Muller stood with one foot on the step of the taxi, smiling and showing his white teeth.

He spoke to the driver.

"The Villa Felix, Mustapha. You know it?"

The driver scratched his head. There were so many new villas with strange names.

"The lane turns off the road to El Biar."

"Ah, from the Colonne Voirol."

"That's it."

Mr. Muller tipped his porter, got into the car, and was driven up into Algiers, while Saratoff looked about him for a little man with burning eyes and a yellow face.

"Come, little one, the earth is solid, and I know where the Black Cat has his saucer of milk."

Gorouki smiled faintly.

"My stomach is still going up and down. What do we do next, big one?"

"Look for a lodging. I'm hungry. Never have I felt so hungry in all my life."

The road from Algiers to Mustapha climbs steadily, with clanging trams and hooting automobiles and labouring carts, and ever the sea grows broader and the hills more green. The swinging curves of this great road seem to turn the landscape upon its axis. It is a dusty road, full of tree shadows and broad sunlight, and when Saratoff and Gorouki toiled up it on that spring morning it showed them life in rags and in royal blue. They passed the Governor's summer residence, where two or three Spahis lounged in their red cloaks, and the cosmopolitan Hôtel St. George where Americans make quick lunches and buy innumerable picture-postcards, and the gardens offer to red-faced northern ladies the white trumpets of arum lilies. They passed under the pines of the Bois, and so came to the Colonne Voirol, and here Saratoff leaned against a wall and produced a carefully folded piece of paper.

"Never trust to your memory, little one."

Gorouki snuggled up beside him, glancing at the paper upon which Saratoff had scribbled in pencil those magic words:

"Villa Felix. Lane off the road from the Colonne Voirol to El Biar."

He had spelt the names incorrectly, but that did not matter.

A sign indicated the road to El Biar. Saratoff produced two oranges, and gave one to Gorouki.

"We begin to explore. It is unwise to ask questions."

They went up the El Biar road, scattering orange peel, and discussing life. Once or twice Gorouki had to slip a hand under his shirt, for their lodging in the Kasbah had been full of other sorts of life.

There were roses in the hedgerows.

"I gather that our friend has a bed of roses. It is very peaceful country."

"Plenty of cream for the cat."

"It is a sly animal."

They came to a lane running to the right, and they adventured down this lane. It was leafy and still, and on either side of it the hidden gardens of scattered villas were full of secret flowers and perfumes. Cypresses close the blue of the sky. There were fruit trees,

and old pines and olives, and mimosa, and creepers of purple and gold. Birds sang. White walls glimmered amid the green, and the hillside sunned itself happily.

"If he lives up here——" said the little man.

"Ah, it is gentler than Russia. The cat has chosen a spot in the sun. Wise cat."

They looked at each other, and smiled.

Quite suddenly they arrived at the gateway of Monsieur Muller's retreat. It was an inconspicuous gate of wood, set back in a recess between two high stone pillars and overshadowed by trees. "Villa Felix." It was impossible to see over the gate, and from the lane the villa itself was invisible, for trees and shrubs screened it.

The two stood in silence, eyeing the gate.

"Oh, wise cat," said Saratoff in a whisper, "and yet — not quite wise enough. Life finds one out."

The lane descended, and Saratoff and Gorouki descended with it, peering cautiously into the green tangle for a glimpse of Ginkelstein's house. Where the garden ended a rough path led from the lane along a wild old terrace overgrown with trees. The two Russians explored the terrace. The garden of the Villa Felix was shut off from it by a bank of oleander and arbutus, and it was little Gorouki who found the spy-hole in the bottom of this evergreen hedge. He went on his knees. He held up a hand for silence, and then beckoned.

"I see him."

Saratoff crouched beside his friend. They were looking up towards the villa, and against its whiteness cherries and peach trees made a smother of white and cerise. The villa had a pillared loggia partly in sunlight, and partly in shadow, and hung with creepers. There were palms and orange trees in the garden, and beds of many coloured anemone, violets and crimson stock; and between two of the white pillars of the loggia a man reclined in a long, cane chair. He was dressed in a suit of white drill, with a big black tie. He had just finished his morning coffee and rolls, and was lighting a cigar.

"By the blood of our martyrs," said the little man, "he takes his ease."

Somewhere in the white villa a woman began to sing. Her voice went up into the sunlight, a sensuous and happy voice. They saw

her come to an upper window and lean out; she was combing a mass of honey-coloured hair, and she laughed down at the man in the chair. And he, sitting up and blowing smoke, enjoyed the desirableness of her, and spoke to her softly with a voice that was suave and tender.

Gorouki gripped Saratoff's arm.

"My God! The beast! He is happy. He has slunk away with the plunder. And our women lie tumbled together in a filthy hole in the ground."

"He is ours," said Saratoff softly.

They lay there in the grass like a couple of fierce beasts, watching this other beast and his mate, and yet there was a rightness, an ethical inevitableness in their ferocity. Their thoughts went back to Russia where this man who sat in a chair and sunned himself had perpetrated unthinkable things. Red-handed, suavely cruel, and loving cruelty for its own sake, he had robbed and butchered. Then, like the sly, suave, cunning creature that he was he had gathered up his plunder and disappeared. The black leopard had become the sleek black cat, a cosmopolitan animal, hiding itself in new countries, with the blood washed from its paws.

They talked in whispers.

"The Villa Felix! He feels himself safe. All his loot turned into foreign bonds."

"A respectable householder!"

"Wealthy and happy."

"He can travel like a rich merchant, and drink his wine and ogle the women, and own a villa in the sun. What do you think about it, little one?"

Gorouki made that noise in his throat.

"My wife and two children were kicked into a frozen hole in the ground. Why did we not die — then, my friend? Was it fate, hope, faith in the day that would come?"

He rested his chin on his crossed wrists.

"Yes, you were right — not to hurry. It is good to have seen him here, thinking himself so safe. How ironical! And — I wish him to die slowly ——"

"Not one plunge of the knife, little one."

"No, no. Slowly. And I shall feel like a priest of justice. It will

be a solemn moment, my friend, so very solemn. And afterwards — my heart will sing like the heart of a bird."

When the warm dusk descended upon the garden of the Villa Felix two figures crawled towards the white loggia. A table had been laid for dinner, and Saratoff and Gorouki lay curled up in one of the flower-beds, watching. Two Arab servants served the dinner, and Muller and his mate sat under a soft shaded lamp, and laughed and talked and clinked glasses. When the meal was over, and the coffee had been served Muller smoked, while the woman sat on his knees. He blew smoke at her, and she ruffled his oiled hair with her hands.

"Go and make music," he said.

Her figure flickered through the doorway of the room opening upon the loggia. There was the ripple of a piano; she began to sing, and while she sang two crouching figures with naked feet slipped into the further end of the loggia.

The woman sang.

"*L'amour — c'est la vie.*"

Muller lay relaxed — purring.

And then two hands came from behind him and closed upon his throat, and a folded cap was pressed over his mouth.

The woman's voice floated out into the night.

"Love is life ——"

Presently she ceased her singing, and sat with her hands resting upon the keyboard, and smiling.

"*Chéri,*" she called, "what next?"

No one answered her, and with a little amused, jerk of the shoulders, she rose and went out into the loggia.

"*Méchant,*" she laughed; "when I sing — you sleep."

But Petrovsky — alias Ginkelstein — was sleeping the last sleep — with a look of terror in his widely open eyes.

The Other Woman

THEY MET IN SWITZERLAND. IT WAS ON THE RINK AT CAUX; BUT not as most people meet for the first time, decorously, casually, but with sudden, breathless impact.

"Oh, I'm so sorry."

He had to grip her by the arms and hold her up. She was a beginner, and somehow she had come slithering into him while he was in the midst of weaving some complicated pattern.

"I'm so sorry. I'm only learning."

"That's all right."

He was aware of her as a breathless, glowing thing with copper-coloured hair tucked under a grass-green knitted cap. Her jumper was of the same vivid greenness. And for a moment her eyes looked into his grey eyes with the pupils of a bigness that made the eyes look black.

"All right — now?"

"Yes."

His smile was no more than a slight relaxing of his very grave face. He removed his hands, and let her stand unsupported.

"That was a near thing. My fault."

"No; mine. I saw you, and somehow I simply couldn't stop. That paralysed feeling."

"You'll soon get over it."

"I hope so."

She laughed. She was not wearing breeches, but a white skirt, and he was glad of the skirt, but without realizing that such a prejudice might have possibilities. She glowed. She had the red, winter sun behind her, and the ice spread a blueness over its white powdering. And he became aware of a sudden sense of being up among the pine woods and the mountains in a world of light and of youth.

He said:

"I think I have seen you dancing."

She stood off and looked at him attentively rather like a grave and sensitive child.

"I expect you have."

"You'll skate well — pretty soon. They go together."

"Thank you. Really, you put that rather nicely."

So it began.

Richard Service had snatched ten days from a London that froze and thawed and drizzled. He belonged to the firm of Blair, Goss & Service, solicitors, of Carfax Street, Mayfair. He had a house at Lelham; but he had let it furnished since the death of his wife two years ago, and had occupied a small service-flat in Blandford Terrace. He was thirty-seven and childless. There were times when he loathed London with a very great loathing.

Joyce Muirhead lived with an aunt at No. 203 Pelham Crescent. She was twenty-four and an orphan. She had some two hundred a year of her own, and a passion for Alsatian puppies, the plays of John Galsworthy, and the music of Ravel and Debussy. Being sufficiently sanguine to have passions for things other than motor-cars and tennis stars, she was not too modern.

Service puzzled her; he seemed to be unusual, and to be unusual is to attract that which is worth attracting. Joyce saw him as a tall, thin, darkish man, with one of those grave, shut-up faces that suggest a window with the blind drawn down. He held aloof. A beautiful skater, he kept to himself, and appeared content to weave patterns of his own, and to be absorbed in his own smooth glidings. Aloof he might be, but not superciliously so. She had never seen him dance. He had a chair in the smoking-room and a book. Sometimes she would see him standing for a few minutes in the doorway of the hotel ball-room, watching.

She thought him sad and rather lonely, interestingly lonely.

Her aunt — Mrs. Lomax — stout and solid, who stodged about in Bedford cord breeches, trailing a *luge*, and who fell down a great deal, and played bridge every night from half-past eight to eleven-thirty, remained unaware of Richard Service. He played his games by himself; he was not a card man; you never met him in the American bar.

Mrs. Lomax liked her cocktails.

She always referred to herself as a very observant person, which meant that she had eyes for the pips on a card, and the loose thread on a jumper, and for little else. For quite a week she failed to observe that her niece and Service were beginning to play a game together. Someone said to her:

"It looks like a case."

Mrs. Lomax, debating the question whether she should go three no trumps, betrayed another obsession.

"Not 'flu, I hope?"

She had a horror of 'flu and of being ill in hotels. It was so expensive, and it interfered with your bridge.

"No; your niece."

Mrs. Lomax's very blue eyes stared.

"Joyce? There's nothing the matter with Joyce. There never is. Three no trumps, partner."

The other lady smiled at a smoke ring.

"Yes; your niece looks a very healthy young woman. Quite—normal, I should say."

So normal that she had persuaded Service to dance, though the persuasion was like the music of the Immortal Hour. His dancing, unlike his skates, was a little rusty, but that was of no great consequence, for the rustiness soon wore away. Joyce had the frankness of modernity, even though her temperament matched the colour of her hair.

"I'd give anything to be able to waltz on skates."

He offered to try and teach her. And then he remembered that he had only four more days, and that Joyce's enthusiasm was still none too steady on the outside edge, and he debated with himself, and then sent off a wire to Blair.

"Staying another week."

Old Blair grumbled. These junior partners were not what junior partners had been forty years ago. Too much this, and too much that, and too damned independent. But Service had his week. Who was to deny it to him when skates rang on the Swiss ice?

Joyce's explorings of the waltz on ice were enthusiastic and always on the edge of a catastrophe.

"Oh, Mr. Service, I am a fool."

There were occasions when she clutched him, and he had to hold

her up, and they laughed in each other's faces. Such intimacies were obviously good or bad for both of them, and in a little while her cry became:

"Oh, Dick, I am a poisonous idiot."

She was supremely good-tempered, and her good temper mattered to Richard Service. He did not tell her so. He was thirty-seven, and he had lived in one particular sort of human hell, and when the flare of Joyce's head seemed to lure him over the edge of himself, he still hung back and hesitated. She was adorable; but just how adorable was she? He was afraid of being scorched, because he knew that he could care rather terribly.

He asked for a sign from heaven, and it was given him — and by a waiter carrying a plate of soup. Mrs. Lomax and her niece sat at a table in the middle of the dining-room; Service had a table by the wall, but it gave him a view of Joyce's back, and her aunt's very neat head, so permanently waved.

Someone jostled the waiter, and half a plate of soup descended upon Joyce's back. The soup was hot; also she was wearing her particular frock, a green crêpe de Chine.

Service's impulse was to grab his table-napkin and make a rush; but, being English, he remained in his chair and did not add to the scene. For there was a scene. Mrs. Lomax made it. She called the waiter a *bête cochon*, and the man looked tempted to throw the rest of the soup at her.

He was insolent, and Mrs. Lomax stood up on her solid feet, and called for the head-waiter and the manager. But Service was not interested in this rather unseemly pother; he was interested only in Joyce's face. She was standing. She was looking poignantly at her aunt.

"Oh, don't, auntie. It doesn't matter."

She smiled at the frightened and insulted waiter.

"I'm sure it wasn't your fault."

She went down the room towards the door. She was going to change her frock. The incident had hurt her, but it had not made her angry.

Service watched her go, and his eyes had a softness. Presently he would be saying to her:

"You were awfully decent to that waiter."

He did say it; and next day, trailing a desultory *luge* up in the pine woods, he said other things.

He asked her to marry him, but not before he had told her that she would be his second wife.

She looked very grave over it. Marriage or the prospect of marriage is not much the mode these days, but Joyce had not contemplated a perpetual and armed neutrality. With certain temperaments some sort of sex compact is inevitable, and Joyce had always had marriage at the end of her vista, but she had not thought of herself as becoming a second edition, an encore. It was to have been very much her marriage, not a stepping into another woman's shoes. Even in these divorceful days some women remain fastidious.

She said:

"I don't know, Dick. It's so serious."

Besides, he was thirteen years older than she was.

"I don't want to rush you, Joyce, but I do care, and pretty badly. But I don't care — just for myself."

She let him hold her hand.

"It's not quite the same, Dick, as if —— I want to be honest."

"I know. But a man learns, unless he is a beast or a fool."

"You do want me?"

"Not unless —— One gets out of the way of being greedy. But you are rather unique. I'm not much good at the casual lingo of the day."

She said:

"I shouldn't like you to be. I think we're more in earnest. But life's such a pose."

"That's just what you are not."

"Oh, my dear, when one's awfully in earnest one can be afraid."

"You need not be afraid of me."

She wasn't. But somehow she was a little afraid of the shadow and of the lingering perfume of that other woman.

"Dick, if I marry you, promise ——"

"Well?"

"You won't think of me as a second edition, and always be quoting the first."

"I promise."

They were to be married in April. Service's tenants vacated the house at Lelham at the end of March, so that matters promised to accommodate themselves to the occasion. Service was giving up the flat in Carfax Terrace, for Joyce asked for the country after five years in Pelham Crescent with Mrs. Lomax. She wanted to garden, and to keep two dogs, and have a punt on the river.

Service, feeling absurdly young and happy and with a sense of life renewed, arranged to have a large part of Weir House redecorated while he and Joyce were away on their honeymoon. They had decided to go to Switzerland to see the Spring flowers. Service bought a two-seater car. Old Blair grumbled. He supposed that Service would be demanding another holiday in August or September, but Service muzzled him.

"No; I think we shall be quite happy down there. We want to get the garden in order."

Early in April, before the decorators did their damndest, Service drove Joyce down to Lelham in the new car. Her young dignity allowed itself a brightness of the eyes. She would have her enthusiasm without dawdling and languor. She was April, but she did not loiter on the first tee, purposely keeping mere man waiting, and drawling out her little cynicisms. She was going to see her house; being a healthy young woman and very well loved, she was beginning to forget that the house had possessed a previous woman.

Service was nervous. At thirty-seven so final an adventure is more serious than at twenty-five.

"Anything you would like altering, you know. I want you to choose the colours."

She gave him a quizzical, happy look.

"Oh, we'll compromise about the colours — if necessary. Who's going to do the giving in, Dick?"

"Is it necessary?"

"Someone always does."

"Supposing we take turns at it — halve the choices?"

"Always?"

"Yes; always."

She was not aware of his nervousness; his habit of reserve helped him; also he was so much hers. He drove the car through Lelham and down Abbey Lane towards the river. They came to the subdued

length of an old red brick wall, with fruit trees and the top of a yew hedge showing above it.

"Our wall."

"Is it? How lovely. I've always wanted a garden with an old red wall."

Iron gates, hung on red brick pillars, opened upon a paved walk. The house itself, not too large and beautifully balanced, Queen Anne at its best, stood back at the end of a formal garden with panels of grass, and clipped yews, and lavender hedges and stone paths. Window-sashes and frames, door, and the woodwork of the leaded hood were all painted white.

Service watched his future wife's face as she got out of the car, and stood between the two gate pillars and gazed. He had a moment of suspense. Some of these young things were so "new arty."

"Dick, it's perfect!"

"Like it?"

"Love it. It looks as though it smelt of lavender."

He was intensely relieved. He slipped a hand under her arm.

"It's quite a gem in its way. At least, I think so. And the garden goes down to the river. Shall we go inside first?"

"Yes, let's."

The interior was gently dark, but not too dark. The hall was panelled and painted a soft green; dining-room and drawing-room were also panelled, but their colour was a flat white. Most of the furniture was Georgian, carefully collected by Service in other days. There were bright rugs and carpets, brass, and old pictures. They went from room to room. They stood at windows and looked out into the garden. Daffodils were in flower. Somewhere a blackbird was singing.

They stood close.

"Like it, Joyce?"

Her face was smooth and tranquil.

"It's the sort of house I have dreamed of."

Gently he kissed the little half-moon of hair that protruded from under her green hat.

"Well, it's yours. Alter anything. I want you to feel it is yours."

To begin with, the house accepted Joyce as though it had known

no other woman. The first three months were all that Richard Service could have asked for. He rushed back from London like a boy; they gardened, they went on the river, they played tennis; and life was not complete unless they did these things together. At week-ends they would take the car and a luncheon-basket and disappear. The staff, marvel of marvels, created no discords. Joyce had a happy touch in dealing with servants.

Then a change came. Joyce could not say just how or when she began to feel something: a curious sense of otherness in the house, a kind of awareness of some other presence. But she did remember the day of the thunderstorm, not because of the storm, but because of an incident that was associated with it. She was not afraid of storms. She happened to be in the drawing-room, busy going through the books in an old, glass-fronted bureau, for this piece of furniture had never been touched since their marriage. She had noticed a book bound in black and gold brocade, with no title to it — and she took it down and opened it, or rather, the book seemed to open of itself at a particular place.

She stood staring, for the book contained no print, and between the open leaves she saw lying, like the ghosts of pressed flowers, a loop of black hair and a slip of white silk. She had a most strange feeling of having discovered something that was sinister and ironical. The room was dark, and she was in the act of moving to one of the windows for more light, when a flash seemed to fall like a bolt of fire into the garden. She saw the top of the cedar of Lebanon on the lawn shivered in a blaze of white light. It crashed, leaving a splintered stump.

For the first time in her life she was frightened. The windows still seemed to be quivering with the shock. She had dropped the book on the floor, and the coil of hair and the slip of white silk lay on the carpet.

She heard the frightened voices of the servants.

"Mary, the house is struck."

"Oh — bless us, it was a chimney."

They came rushing in, to find Joyce standing in the middle of the room with a queer stillness.

"Oh, ma'am — the house ——!"

She pointed towards the window.

"No; the tree, the poor tree, the cedar. Look."

"Oh, ma'am, supposing there's another flash? It may be the house this time."

"It's not likely, Mary; we've had our escape."

She sent them away reassured, and then the blackness overhead broke in a deluge of rain, a grey sheet that hung like a curtain. Gutters and pipes gurgled; the moist rush of the rain brought a coolness, almost a chilliness; there was no other sound to be heard. And Joyce was sitting in a Sheraton chair, looking at that book on the floor, and the relics it had disclosed. She was afraid of that book, more afraid of it than she had been of the storm, for she seemed to divine in it a something hostile towards herself. But mingled with her fear was curiosity. The thing fascinated her.

It lay half-open, prone, with the leaves crumpled and its black and gold brocaded cover suggesting the skin of a snake. Her curiosity prevailed, though it was more than mere curiosity that made her pick up the book and examine it. She felt that she had to examine it. It was like the book of knowledge of good and evil.

She stood by the window with the rain rushing down. She held in her hands the day-book or diary of a woman who was dead, Service's first wife. She read, and read with a kind of fascinated guilty horror, a shrinking of her sensitive self, for the book was too intimate. Every page had its intimacies.

But what manner of woman had this been? Passionate, possessive, morbid, analytical. All her thoughts were there, moods that were both glowing and sombre. She wrote of Service; his name was on every page. She wrote of him as "My man." Sometimes she wrote angrily, with a jealous glance at the world.

She was a woman who had been furiously possessive; she handled that which she possessed, and turned it over and examined it like a woman examining jewellery and dresses, things that were intimately hers. She wrote of the house as hers, and the garden as hers. She spoke of pieces of furniture which had grown familiar to Joyce, and suddenly Joyce realized the other woman in the very chair in which she had been sitting.

She felt stricken, chilled. And yet she read; she felt somehow that she had to read.

She came upon one secret sentence that made the woman in her

tremble at the knees. "My man——" And Service was her man. And yet he was like the very furniture in the house; he had belonged to this other woman.

On the last page of all she came upon the final threat.

"If any woman comes after me let her be accursed. I will mis-wish her—though I be dead."

There was a fire laid in the grate behind a needlework screen, and Joyce removed the screen and lit the fire. It burnt sluggishly and slowly, but when she had got it to blaze she took those relics and the book and placed them on the fire. She did it deliberately. She felt that the book was evil, and that in burning it she was defending both herself and her husband from the menace of the past. Watching the leaves crumple and scorch and burn she tried to assure herself that the business was over, that she had discovered a skeleton and destroyed it. She was prepared to feel relieved, secure, her happy, personal self.

But what an extraordinary thing that Dick should never have discovered the book. She was glad. Almost it had seemed to her like the book of a vampire.

Service came back to a clear sky, and a rain-washed world. He found his wife in the front garden recovering some of the flowers which had had their faces dashed and drabbled.

"Hallo! You seem to have had the storm here rather badly."

She straightened and stood looking at him, and there was a something in her eyes that Service did not understand. A man's love is not always blind because of his self-centred maleness, and Richard Service was troubled. He thought that Joyce looked frightened.

"Nothing happened, Eve?"

His pet name for her was Eve.

"Yes; come and see."

She went to him and snuggled against him, as though for warmth, and to feel that he was hers.

"I've been frightened, Dick."

"My dear one——"

He had an arm around her.

"What's happened?"

"The tree—our beloved tree."

She took him and showed him the broken cedar, and he looked

shocked.

"Good Lord! It might have been the house! Where were you?"

"In the drawing-room."

"Poor old tree. If I'd known I should have been scared to death."

And suddenly she clung to him.

"You do love me, Dick; you do, don't you?"

"My dear——"

"You always will, whatever happens?"

He was troubled, challenged. Why this cry of pain, this question? Was it woman, and the way of a woman? Had something——?

"Why, you are the one thing that matters to me. Good heavens, don't you know?"

"Oh, Dick, I want to feel sure."

"You can feel sure. I say—everything's all right? You're not——?"

She pressed her forehead against his shoulder.

"Oh, yes—no, nothing of that sort. I've been frightened, Dick. I wanted you."

"You dear."

But she did not tell him about the book.

Joyce had burnt the book, but you cannot burn a memory—and the memory remained. It was more than a memory. It was as though that other woman had survived as an unseen, unfelt presence in the house, unable at first to make her presence sensed, but striving to do so. And Joyce's discovery of the diary, and the sudden intimate yet hostile contact between the living and the dead had broken down some mysterious barrier. The other woman was neither visible nor audible; but she was felt: she was in the atmosphere; she walked in the garden; she sat in the chairs; she looked into the mirrors, even into that little Queen Anne mirror on Joyce's dressing-table.

It had been the other woman's mirror.

Joyce bought a new looking-glass, and had the other one put away in the boxroom.

She was a healthy young person. She would say to herself: "Don't be so absurd." But the absurdity was becoming a most sinister and haunting reality.

She could not forget those last, written words:

"If any woman comes after me——"

The house was haunted, not by any visible or audible ghost, but by a presence, the remnants of a personality, the associations of a woman who had slept where Joyce now slept. The thing began to permeate her consciousness. Insensibly she was obsessed by the horrible conviction that she and Richard were not alone, and that a third person moved and listened and hated. The rooms were filled with jealousy, suspicion.

Joyce began to suffer. She tried to fight the thing down, but she did not succeed. She began to feel afraid to be alone; she was sleeping badly; she grew nervous, moody, irritable. The house had lost its beauty; it was no longer hers; it was becoming hateful, dark, sinister. It would startle her with imagined noises! Sometimes, in the dusk, when passing from one room to another, or when climbing the stairs, she would stand still and listen, convinced of some imminent presence. She felt that she was going to be touched — that she would see a shape, something. She knew terror, that nameless, indescribable fear.

She began to lose her healthy poise, her good temper. It was as though that presence was willing to say things that she did not mean, cruel, hateful things. Sometimes her face looked sullen.

Service had noticed the change in her. He was worried. It was as though the sun had gone in, and life had grown suddenly dark.

What was the matter?

Joyce did not meet him as she used to meet him. She was clouded, strange. She seemed to have something on her mind. She was touchy, incalculable, puzzling.

"Anything the matter, Eve?"

"Matter? Why should there be?"

"I've thought — lately——"

"Perhaps I'm bored."

She was aware of his shocked, hurt face. He was frightened, but not so frightened as she was, for those words had come blurting out as though some other self in her had uttered them. They were not her words. Almost it was not her voice, but the voice of some other personality speaking through her.

She burst into tears.

"I didn't mean that. I don't know what made me say it."

But even while he was being gentle to her she was aware of that spirit of doubt and of dread in him. He was frightened.

She had said it. What was her denial worth? A young wife did not blurt out such words without reason. The incident left him perplexed and brooding.

What did it mean? Was this second marriage of his slipping down towards unhappiness, and the tragedy of a dead and casual ennui? Was he one of those unfortunate men who lack the essential something? Was he too old for Joyce? For, to begin with, she had seemed to be happy, such a glowing, wholesome creature; they had played together almost like girl and boy; they had no worries, no incompatabilities.

He brooded over it. He was hurt in his secret pride, and in his tenderness.

Perhaps she was ill. Perhaps she was going to have a child?

He watched her, and she was only too conscious of being watched. She felt that she was being driven, forced towards disharmonies. His troubled glances accused her, irritated her.

"What about a doctor, Eve?"

"A doctor? I don't need a doctor."

"You don't seem quite the thing."

"Oh, don't fuss me; I can't stand being fussed."

She saw his poor face close. He grew suddenly and lamentably silent. He got up from the breakfast-table and lit his pipe and glanced at his copy of *The Times*. She fled. What was happening to her? What made her say the things she did? She went out into the garden, and wandered miserably down to the river. Why not tell him? Wasn't that the only sensible and human thing to do? She would go and tell him, but when she returned to the house she found that he had gone without seeing her again. The manner of his going was a challenge and a reproach.

She spent a miserable day, and so did Service. The hours dragged; he found it difficult to concentrate upon his work, and to pay attention to other people's affairs and troubles when he was so full of his own particular worry. He had to interview a difficult client, a woman with a grievance who took her emotions out for exercise and who talked nineteen to the dozen. Ostensibly she came to be advised, and left advice lying like rejected articles on a shop counter.

Service lost patience. He was frankly ungallant.

"May I remind you — in your own interest, that we charge clients for advice even when it is not taken."

She was a thoroughly unreasonable woman, but he got rid of her, and dictated his letters, and locked up his desk.

"I am going off early to-day, Miss Jones."

He caught the 4.15 train. He began by walking fast from Lelham station, but as he approached Weir House his pace slackened. He was afraid: he shrank from the unknown, the possible mood, the shadow of a vague disillusionment. How preposterous it was. A month ago there had been no such shadow.

He entered his house almost with a feeling of surreptitiousness, of sneaking in. He hung up his hat, and put his attaché case away in the study. He stood hesitating in the hall as though not knowing where to go or what to do.

And suddenly the drawing-room door opened; he saw his wife standing there; she too seemed to hesitate, and then she made one swift rush to him, and clung.

"Oh, Dick; oh, my dear."

He was deeply moved.

"Why — Eve — my darling — that's all right. I thought I'd come home early."

She clung.

"Dick, I've got something to tell you. I must tell you. Oh, my dear, you do love me, don't you?"

"I think I love you too much."

"You can't — but — you can't. I've got to ask you to do such a big thing. It's the house. I can't live here, Dick. It's — haunted."

He was astonished, but he hid his astonishment.

"Why? How do you mean?"

"Come in here. I'll tell you. I must tell you. Lock the door."

She was trembling. She drew him to the sofa.

"Sit down; hold my hand. I want to ask you something."

"Anything you like."

"I want you to tell me — what was she like — my predecessor, the woman who lived here before me?"

He looked at her.

"You mean — Violet?"

"Yes, You must tell me. Was there anything ——?"

He was silent a moment. His face looked dark and strange.

"I've kept — this quiet. It seemed only fair and decent."

"Yes, but tell me."

"She was a woman with an ungovernable temper. She was — what you call passionate and exacting."

Joyce's head touched his shoulder.

"Oh, my dear — she's here still. I can feel her — everywhere. She's hating me — trying to will me into beastliness. No; I'm not being mad or silly. I did not feel her here at first, but gradually she came. I can't live here, Dick. It's spoiling everything, and we were so happy."

He put a hand over her head.

"My dear, forgive me; I ought to have felt."

"Dick, if you love me, take me away from here. Let's start fresh, fresh with everything. You're not mine here. And she's turning me and everything into evil."

His face had grown very gentle.

"Of course. That's the only thing that matters. I'll have it done at once. We'll go up to town, until you have found your own real house, Joyce."

She clung to him.

"Oh, Dick, you haven't failed me. I'm not mad. You'll see — when we begin again. I don't want to grow like her."

What About It?

THEY WERE A PAIR OF BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS. THEY CAME TO occupy one of the new little houses in Oakwood Chase, and their house was as much a flight of fancy as the name of the road in which it stood. The speculative gentleman who had laid out the estate appeared to understand both human nature and the art of symbolism. There were two oak trees in Oakwood Chase, one at each end of it, but that did not matter, for there had been other oak trees that had fallen to the axe. Also a cedar tree and a grove of some twenty Scotch firs had supplied the speculative gentleman with inspirations, and it was possible to rent or buy a house in Cedar Walk or in Firland Avenue.

The little house of the bright young things had "Chase Cot" painted in black on a deal gate painted white. Mark you it was a double gate, for "Chase Cot" had seven yards of gravel that was called the drive. It led to the garage. The garage had doors stained brown with creosote, and a pink roof of asbestos tiling. It was occupied in those early days by two bicycles, a second-hand mower, a garden barrow, two deck-chairs, a collection of tools, and a Japanese screen with a hole in it.

Wilfred went up to town each day with a bowler hat somewhat on the back of his head. He occupied a subordinate position in the city. Maisie, standing between the little white pillars of the porch, and looking like "The River Girl," as photographed for one of the illustrated penny papers, raised a pretty and benedictory arm.

"So long, old thing."

"Cheerio."

"Don't forget to buy the nasturtium seed."

"Is it likely!"

Wilfred was fair, with a biggish nose and an air of cheerful cockiness. He liked to be impressive. His voice had a slight throatiness. He had had cards printed. "Mr. Wilfred Smythe — 'Chase Cot'

—Oakwood Chase—Riverton,"

Maisie was dark, with a shingled head, and an air of alert vivacity. All her movements were quick and a little exaggerated, and her adjectives suggested that life was very exciting. Things were topping and marvellous and too perfectly sweet. She was very full of her youth, and was apt to air the conceit of it, as young things will, and she had social ambitions. She wore cerise and yellow jumpers, and put on an air of refinement when she shopped, and when referring to her husband in the presence of strangers, spoke of him as Mr. Smythe.

There were some thirty other houses in Oakwood Chase. They were very much alike in that each pretended to be quite unlike its neighbours. Some had gables at the front, some at the side; some wore their lower windows well forward, some under the aloofness of little loggias. Some said quip at you, others said quap. But each had the same small garage, and the same sized garden, and there was a great deal of crazy paving, and on a summer evening some dozen hoses would be sending little spurts of water over the grass plots and the herbaceous borders. Some twenty-eight of the thirty garages contained cars, and the cars were nearly all alike, Mostyns and Cosy Cambridges and Shinos. Some were blue, some grey, some claret coloured. Certainly the Buzzards at "Oak Top" owned a Malvis saloon; but then the Buzzards were rather pretentious people who kept two Alsatians, and twice a year went up to dine at the "Bentley."

Meanwhile the garage at "Chase Cot" contained nothing but its two humble push-bikes and its etceteras, and though Maisie could put out on the front lawn two orange and black deck-chairs, and a table with a syphon and a whisky decanter on it, she was very conscious of the deficiency. Wilfred might stand with his hose and look quite distinguished in blue shirt and collar, but there were all those other cars paraded in the roadway, or buzzing off or buzzing in.

The crisis arrived when the twenty-ninth garage welcomed a car. It was next door to "Chase Cot." It belonged to people called Pumpelly, and to Maisie it was obvious that people with such a name as Pumpelly were doomed to be unlikeable. They were, or at least so to Maisie. Mr. Pumpelly was a thick-set, loud little man who looked

as though his legs had been forgotten and had been attached in a hurry as an afterthought; but it was Mrs. Pumpelly who raised Maisie's ire. She was very tall and thin, and sallow and sidy; her shoulders drooped; the whole of her drooped with a kind of sophisticated, night-club condescension. She said "Morning" to you with a casual drawl. She possessed too many clothes. She always had lots of things dangling, amber, jade, or what she called jade. Maisie called it something else.

But when the Pumpelly "Shino" arrived, and the Smythes saw Mr. Pumpelly polishing the radiator, and Mrs. Pumpelly staging herself about it with a long black cigarette-holder drooping at an angle, the Smythes succumbed to the same snake. Wilfred had been cutting the grass with the second-hand mower. Maisie reclined in one of the orange and black deck-chairs.

"I wouldn't have a 'Shino,' " said Maisie.

"I should say not."

"Tin-pot prams."

"Cambridge Sports — that's it."

And then they looked at each other, and the extravagance was conceived and confessed.

"Well, why not? Ten pounds down."

Maisie's eyes blickered.

"Oh, Pip, let's. We can afford it."

They could, with reservations; but what are reservations to an age that expects to live at twenty-five as fifty can live at fifty and without all the silly bother of being keen on the obsolete function called work. Wilfred had a big nose and an air, and wore a plus four suit at week-ends, but he was not very highly prized by the elders under whom he laboured. So their reservations were lightly accepted, and Wilfred paid a visit to the West End offices of the firm that distributed the "Cosy Cambridge" car. He announced that he wished to purchase a car on the installment system, and that it was quite all right, and he produced his card with "Chase Cot — Oakwood Chase" upon it. The salesman was polite; he knew his Wilfred. No difficulties were put in Wilfred's way, for that is one of the problems of the age, no one makes life a little healthily hard for the Wilfreds.

The car arrived early in July. Tender preparations had been made

for its appearance. The birth of a son and heir might have been hailed with less enthusiasm. The garage had been swept and garnished, and Maisie had made a pair of dust-curtains, and the small hose had been told that in the future the car would be more important than the garden. Everyone in Oakwood Chase knew that the Smythes were getting a car, and that curmudgeon — old Buzzard — had fluffed himself up and talked pompously.

"Silly young fool. The size of his bank balance might justify a pram."

Men of fifty are apt to be like that.

The car arrived. A mechanic from the local agents drove it up one Saturday afternoon. In colour it was a nice bright blue, and its hood was shiny and black, and all its plating gleamed. It had a clock and a screen-wiper, all the usual gadgets. It was like thousands of other cars, just as Maisie and Wilfred were like thousands of other young people.

But never had there been such a car. The man left it in the drive, and Maisie and Wilfred looked at it and sat in it, and purred over it, and wiped its immaculate nose, and poked their heads under the bonnet flap and listened to the engine.

"Runs like a Rollys."

"Ain't she sweet!"

Then they sat in the dickey, and put the hood up and let it down again, and unearthed the tools, and tried the headlights. Their neighbours, observing their excitement, were tolerant and amused. Oakwood Chase had experienced all these thrills, even as a part of Oakwood Chase had experienced the thrills of babies.

"Nothing like the first swank feeling," said somebody.

"They'll get used to it when the paint begins to wear."

Both Maisie and Wilfred had been given two or three driving lessons, but they had agreed that the first expedition should take place very early in the morning while the roads were quiet and no censorious and critical eyes could observe them. Meanwhile the new car had to be coaxed into its garage, and Wilfred, in a moment of humility, suggested that that they should push it in.

"Don't want to make a mess of things."

But Maisie would have no such cautions. Mrs. Pumpelly was watching them from the loggia of "The Lido." Mrs. Pumpelly was

always talking of the hectic weeks at the Lido.

"It has got to be driven in. But, say, Pip, what shall we call her?"

"Well, what about it?"

"You mean——?"

"It's an idea. 'What about it?'"

Maisie laughed.

"Sounds rather original."

"Well, when she passes the other people on the road that's what she'll be saying to them: 'What about it?'"

"So she will. And now let's drive her in."

It was Maisie who inserted What About It into the garage, and she did it quite nicely, without running the front wheels into the row of red petrol tins that had been ranged up in a row ready for the new child. Wilfred sat beside her, feeling unselfish. He supposed it was to be a fifty-fifty business.

He broached the subject of gear changing.

"Suppose we have to double declutch changing down. Can you do it?"

Maisie did not know, and Wilfred felt superior.

"I'll show you to-morrow morning."

A month passed, and Maisie and Wilfred had treated the engine of What About It as considerately as two young people can be expected to treat an engine during the period of speedless self-restraint. They took What About It away on their holiday, and garaged her at one of those dishevelled and thoroughly inefficient garages that are to be found in sea-coast towns, where half the cars have to be pushed about in order to extract a particular vehicle which always happened to be in some dark and noisome corner. What About It's right off wing suffered, and someone else crumpled up her tail lamp. Maisie and Wilfred were hurt and annoyed, but they had all the pleasure of talking about "The car" in the lounge of their small hotel.

"I've brought the car round, old thing."

But in a month it must be confessed that Wilfred had developed into an irresponsible road-hog, and that Maisie helped and abetted him. He called himself a "Speed Merchant," and What About It, driven all out and all in, bumped and swayed and snorted. She was made to chase and overtake big saloons, and when the desperate

deed had been done two hatless heads would incline towards each other, and Maisie and Wilfred would exchange arrogant glances.

"Put pip to that Yankee."

"Gosh! That was a Pallas. Must feel a bit sick, mustn't they?"

Maisie would lounge, so that her little black head disappeared below the line of the hood. She would eat bananas, and throw the skins overboard with a casual and careless gesture, and upon one occasion a banana skin landed on the scuttle of a Rollys that had just been eliminated. The people in the Rollys said things to each other. But What About It did not care. It scattered banana skins and odd bits of paper and orange peel. It rocked and chattered past dull and dignified old frowsters who would not travel more than thirty-five miles an hour.

Maisie and Wilfred told terrible lies concerning What About It. They said that she had done "sixty-five," and had climbed the Hog's Back on top at a level forty. They grew reckless and swollen-headed, and committed all the sins of the road. They cut in and passed at blind corners, and pushed cyclists anywhere and everywhere. They got angry glances and were amused.

On one or two occasions people shouted things, and Wilfred would give a little, mocking toot-toot on the horn.

"Put paid to them, what!"

"Half these people can't drive, and get nervy."

There is no doubt but that Wilfred developed a swelled head, nor was his head very big to begin with. He, a hundred-and-fifty-pound man, was trying to compete and out-class the thousand-pounder, but Wilfred did not see it in that way. He had the Isotta Fraschini feeling in the driving seat of What About It, and poor What About It had to play up to her lord's insolence. She was driven mercilessly. Her poor little engine had to perform frantic revolutions. She had to swag her swanky little tail under the noses of the great. She did it, for a time, and largely because her bigger sisters did not want to travel in that particular way.

Then, What About It began to develop a certain delicacy. She had to visit the local garage and have her pulse felt and her tongue examined. Her poor little tummy had been strained.

Wilfred talked largely about the guarantee.

"Only had her three months. What? You think it's a piston?

Shouldn't have happened. I'm a most careful driver."

The garage proprietor looked down his nose. He had had experience of careful drivers like Wilfred; also he and other Riverton people had experienced Wilfred personally. For in Oakland Chase Wilfred was known as "Hustling Harry," and most of the older men would add: "damned young fool."

What About It was provided with a new piston, and Wilfred had to pay, because the cussed idiot of an expert said that the car had been over-driven. Wilfred still had a number of instalments to pay; in fact he had wiped off about a quarter of the purchase price, and somehow it seemed bad business. He talked largely at lunch in a city tea-shop, of going for the makers of the "Cosy Cambridge" car, but of course he did nothing of the sort. He was what Mr. Buzzard called a pip-squeak, and that was all there was to it.

But one day early in October, What About It was taken out upon the Portsmouth road, and being passed by an inoffensive-looking four-seater driven by an elderly gentleman, What About It's lord and master took umbrage. He would show the old blighter something. He hustled his machine up to forty-five, and repassed the grey car, and gave its driver a kind of leer.

But Wilfred had run up against one of those old puckish gentlemen who sometimes play games with young men. Also, the old gentleman had the power to play the game. He repassed Wilfred, though Wilfred kept What About It well in the middle of the road, and showed no grace about giving way.

The old gentleman said something as he passed, and Wilfred went very red.

"Damn the old hog! Tripe merchant."

And he lost his temper. He went blinding after the grey car, and even Maisie grew nervous.

"Here, easy on, old thing."

"I'll show the old blighter."

So it happened that Wilfred took one of his chances; he had taken many, and circumstances had been kind to him, but perhaps he had sinned too often and too flagrantly. Strung before him along a blind curve of the road, Wilfred saw or should have seen a two-seater, a lorry, and the grey car he was chasing with intervals of some fifteen yards between each vehicle, and by all the laws of

reason and decency Wilfred should have followed at the tail of the two-seater until he could see his way clear to pass. But he didn't. He thrust wildly; he hooted wildly. A hand from the two-seater signalled to him warning him to hold back. He did not see it, or did not choose to see it. He was running level with the two-seater when the nose of a big saloon came swinging round the curve.

Came one of those tense, crowded moments. Wilfred accelerated; the drivers of the two-seater and the saloon braked furiously. What About It driven wildly into the gap, ground one wing against the off-front wing of the two-seater. The saloon was half in the hedge. Wilfred tore through, with the lorry thundering steadily ahead of him. He had a moment of panic, of delayed reaction. What About It's brakes squealed, but they squealed too late. She hit the rear of the lorry, seemed to rebound with a smashing of glass, then slid down the camber of the road, hit the grass verge, and quite quietly turned over.

Yet no one was hurt. Maisie and her husband were spilled out upon the grass. Wilfred had a slight cut on his chin. They sat for a moment, considerably frightened and somewhat shaken, and stared at each other.

"Awfully sorry. Hurt?"

"No. Don't think so."

Wilfred got up, and helped his wife to her feet, but What About It lay on her side with her radiator and bonnet crumpled up, and one wheel at a grotesque angle, and the broken lamps twisted this way and that. But the people from the other cars had collected, and seeing that the two sinners were unhurt, they began to say things.

The driver of the saloon, a very angry man, was not polite.

"What the devil do you mean by coming round a blind corner like that?"

The driver of the two-seater, a woman, took up his chant.

"I waved him back. A perfectly disgraceful piece of driving."

"What do you mean by it?"

Wilfred gabbled, and mopped his chin.

"Thought I could get through. This lady ought to have given way."

"Given way! I signalled you. Perfectly monstrous."

"I should say so," said the angry man. "These people ought not to be on the road. Damned tin-pot hogs. I'm going to report to the police."

"You can count on me," said the lady.

And then a fortuitous constable, happening on a bicycle, added legality and a note-book to the affair, and Wilfred and Maisie began to suffer other humiliations. All the details of the smash were recorded, the names and addresses written down, and after a few more caustic comments and traffic delays, and people coming to gaze upon the corpse of What About It, the situation sorted itself out, and Maisie and Wilfred were left derelict.

They had to get home. Also, there was the corpse of What About It to be collected.

Wilfred tried to be cheerful.

"Well, anyway, we're insured."

His wife was inclined to be tearful. She gazed sadly upon the wreckage.

"Those people were horrid. I'm afraid it was our fault. Poor little car."

They managed to get lifts to Riverton, and when they arrived at "Chase Cot" the empty garage reproached them. Wilfred went to ring up the local expert, and his wife sat in the drawing-room and allowed herself the luxury of tears.

But it was a bad business. In due course Wilfred received a summons, and the magisterial bench fined him twenty pounds and costs, and denied him the right to drive a car for a year. The insurance companies haggled. What About It reposed at the local garage, awaiting repairs and the appearance of some ready cash. Wilfred had no ready cash. The legal exactions had bled him grey. Also, there were those confounded instalments to be paid on a car that had ceased to be a car.

Wilfred was worried. He had a feeling that his neighbours were not sympathetic and that Oakwood Chase sniggered. He tried to be the bold, cheerful fellow-my-lad.

"It will be all right, old thing. When the insurance people pay up, we'll have the car made good. And you can drive. Nothing was done about your licence."

But his wife gave him a shock.

"I don't think I want to drive."

"What!"

"I don't think I feel like driving."

Maisie had her reasons for feeling as she did, and when she was quite sure of them she had to break the news to Wilfred. Really, it was disastrous, but one of those human happenings that cannot be helped, yet she wondered how Wilfred would take it. He had had so many expenses and worries.

"Pip, dear, I'm afraid I'm going to have a baby."

She was aware of him looking almost absurdly solemn and rather frightened.

"A baby!"

"Yes; such things do happen, don't they."

"Poor dear darling."

The irresponsible ass in him was sobered, and for a Wilfred he behaved very well. For Wilfredism may be only a phase, or the world would be a chaos of Wilfreds. Nothing more was said about the car, or about those confounded insurance people, or the wretched instalments that fell due upon What About It. Wilfred discovered in himself a sudden restraint, a sense of alarmed responsibility. He became so thoughtful and considerate and kind that Maisie almost wondered whether he was ill.

"Don't you worry, old thing."

People noticed a change in him. At the office he applied himself to work with a strange and sedulous gravity. When the insurance company paid up, he had What About It repaired and painted and exposed for sale in the window of the local garage. Fortune was kind to him, and What About It was purchased by the Riverton hairdresser. The amount that Wilfred recovered just about paid the sum that remained owing on the car.

He said nothing to Maisie about it. Maisie was not to be worried. His jaw was a little more set; he applied himself stoutly to business. Meanwhile, the attitude of Oakwood Chase changed perceptibly towards these two young people. Mr. Buzzard ceased to refer to Wilfred as "A damned young fool," and even the Pumpellys were kind. Mrs. Pumpelly would arrive on the doorstep of "Chase Cot" with a bunch of chrysanthemums, and Maisie accepted

the flowers.

"Really, people are awfully decent, Pip."

"Oh, not so bad."

"The Pumpellys offered to take me out in their car."

"Well, why not?"

"I don't feel like it."

In due course the great event happened, and Wilfred spent a miserable and restless night. People heard him walking up and down Oakwood Chase in the moonlight: a restless soul suffering because his mate was suffering. Mrs. Pumpelly, looking out of her bedroom window exclaimed to her husband:

"Poor dear lad. Shall I call him in and give him a whisky."

"Better let him alone."

But never was there such a baby. What About Its singularity and splendour was eclipsed, and What About Its old home was occupied by a pram. Oakwood Chase somehow approved of the pram, and of the two young people and the small Wilfred who owned it. In fact, young Wilfred appeared to be a far more important person than his father.

As for Maisie, being a normal and healthy young woman she did not regret the passing of What About It. Wilfred had been given an increase in salary. In the future there would be other and more decorous What About Its.

Meanwhile, Oakwood Chase christened the pram the Smythes' "Baby Bunting."

Contraband

I

WILDING SAT WITH HIS BACK TO A ROCK IN A TANGLE OF bramble and bracken. Sally, a spaniel, lay asleep at his feet, and between him and the blue of the sea and the sky gulls cruised to and fro, gliding up against the wind and turning to fly back above the cliff. Their cries were constant and complaining, and always the crying of the gulls above St. Gilians associated itself in Wilding's consciousness with the voice of a woman.

"I can't bear it; I can't face it: I'm a coward."

The voice remained with him with the complaining of the gulls above the Cornish cliffs, though the tragedy of his loneliness had begun three years ago when he had come back from the War like a defaced coin. "The man with half a face": that was what they called him at St. Gilians: a crude stating of the case as it presented itself to those who loitered and gossiped. The return of the soldier! His wound had bled afresh.

Here, on the high cliff, there was a vastness of sunlight and of silence. No wind was blowing. He could see the grey houses of St. Gilians and its bay and harbour a black crescent filled with the blueness of the sea. His dog slept at his feet.

But sometimes his loneliness, and the solitude of his little farm, lay heavy upon him. He bent forward and woke the sleeping dog, and, taking the spaniel into his arms, laid the unscarred side of his face against the dog's muzzle.

"It's all the same to you, old woman."

Sally's answer was the protruding of an affectionate red tongue. She squirmed ecstatically, blinking amber eyes. And suddenly Wilding laughed as a man may laugh when he is feeling desperate.

"Life's a rum business, Sally."

It was; and up at "Orchards," that little white house half hidden by cowering, wind-blown apple trees, life was very primitive. Wilding lived the life of a recluse, going out to work in garden and fields, and coming in to solitude and Sally. He saw no face but the rather grim and sour face of his farmhand, Pengelly. He avoided the faces of his fellow men, and especially the faces of women. In St. Gilians he was sometimes seen at dusk with an old haversack slung over one shoulder and his hat pulled down over his one eye. A little black shade covered the empty socket of the other. For his sensitiveness had increased. Solitude had emphasized it and tinged it wtih morbid melancholy. His aloofness had become the isolation of a man who thought of himself as an outcast, a creature ugly and defaced, shunning humanity and shunned by it.

But by the stone wall of the little garden Wilding paused and looked back towards the sea. A wind-blown thorn tree seemed to stretch compassionate hands above his head. The dog, lying in his arms, looked up devotedly into his scarred face. Sally saw no ugliness there. Her eyes were like the sea, save that they were the eyes of a dog.

Out beyond Shag Head a white motor-boat was making for St. Gilians, like a swift, grey needle eternally threading the foam at its prow. It was Farren's boat — the *Sea Horse*. Farren was an artist. He owned the white bungalow with the flagstaff on the hill across the valley, a Viking of a man with a head of flaming hair.

Wilding watched the boat for a moment. It seemed so alive, so fortunate, tearing homewards towards the harbour.

II

MICHAEL FARREN ran the *Sea Horse* to her moorings where the dinghy lay ready to take him ashore. He was a very tall man with blue eyes and a flamboyant head of hair. St. Gilians had known him for some years, and his erratic comings and goings, and the inconsequential free and easiness of his manners and his clothes. He was bluff; he could laugh; he handled the *Sea Horse* like a master. St. Gilians was used to his old grey flannels and his hatless head, and his powerful red throat rising from the tieless, flopping collar.

In that rather grim little Cornish town he exhaled an adventurousness, something easy and big and picturesque. All the fishermen knew him. The coastguards at the signal station had dipped often into his tobacco pouch.

He painted St. Gilians, and his pictures were like himself, rather flamboyant and gaillard. Often he would have a half-circle of spectators round him when he was painting, and he seemed to enjoy being watched. Children would gather. He had a way with children; he would tell them absurd stories, or, having started a scramble for pennies, he would throw up his flaming head and laugh.

Farren in his dinghy looked rather like a giant in a little white tub. He rowed to the stone steps, fastened the painter to a rusty iron ring, and smiled up at two old fellows who were leaning over the wall.

"Good weather."

"Aye, good weather."

"How's the lady, John?"

"Can't sleep o' nights, sir, spite of mustard and red flannel."

Farren brought out his pouch.

"Fill! May God take me, John, before I get stiff in the back."

They watched him walk away, a big and gaillard man still in the force of his years and carrying his big shoulders smoothly. He went up the narrow street with its grey cobbles. He disappeared. But presently they saw him reappear on the green of the hill above the church, climbing the path to where the white bungalow stood alone behind a white fence and hedge of shabby tamarisk. He climbed as though the steepness of the hill did not trouble him.

But there were matters that troubled Michael Farren, though St. Gilians might think the artist as casual and careless a man as the world could show. St. Gilians supposed that Farren sold his pictures, and that he sold them well, for the bungalow paid its debts, and a man could not keep a motor-boat and a car on air. Farren was so obviously the gentleman: neither caring what he said nor what he did, nor what he wore and how he wore it. His very eccentricities were colourful and unexpected.

He would take the *Sea Horse* out by moonlight, even when a sea was running, and disappear into silvery distances. He would pile an assortment of luggage into the dicky of his two-seater and

disappear over the hills. He might be away three days; and St. Gilians understood that he had gone away to paint.

On the other side of the white fence and behind the tamarisk bushes the most precious of Farren's problems sprawled on the grass. He stood to watch her; unseen by her as yet, a long-legged, dark, slim thing of eighteen with her very black hair a living contrast to her father's flaming head. Her hair had been given her by her mother, a Frenchwoman from the Basque country. She was lying there on the grass and playing with a sheepdog pup enticed in from somewhere.

For Iris Farren had refused to grow up. She had remained a child, long-legged, impulsive, solitary. Her mop of black hair stood out like a nimbus, and the pupils of her eyes would grow so big that the eyes looked black, though the iris was blue-grey. She had one of those long, poignant mouths, and when she smiled the upper lip seemed to curl like a petal.

Somehow she scandalized these Cornish people, being so unlike the unimaginative, hard-faced fishermen and farmers who had no use for birds or flowers. St. Gilians considered her a little weak in the head, a childish creature, remaining irresponsible and immature. She ran wild on the cliffs. She was strange.

But St. Gilians had seen her throw herself furiously upon a group of boys who were stoning a stray kitten.

"Beasts!"

She had used her fists on the louts, and had then gone to pick up the kitten — a thing with its head all bloody. She had made a little compassionate moaning over it.

"Poor — poor!"

She had uttered the word over and over again, and had gone off carrying the kitten. She had a passion for collecting waifs and strays: birds, dogs, cats — any live thing. She had owned a tame tortoise, and a jackdaw that had sat on the end of her bed in the morning and made conversation. Suffering, especially suffering among the dumb things, roused in her an infinite and instant compassion. Only then did she appear to become woman; at other times she was just a longlegged child.

Such was Farren's problem — to keep her as she was, free from the smirching of the thing called love. She was so uncarnal, so like

a Rima of the cliffs and sea.

He passed through the gate.

"Hallo — hallo!"

She was up instantly, leaving the pup lying on his furry back with his paws in the air.

"Daddy!"

She still used the word she had learnt as a toddler, nor had she come to discover the stranger in her father.

"What — another dog!"

"Oh, he just came in to play. He belongs to Zion Farm. No one plays at Zion Farm."

Farren caught her and kissed her.

"Zion, no. They sing hymns through their noses. O paradise, O paradise, where no one plays a game!"

III

OSTENSIBLY Tom Wilding farmed Orchards Farm, but his life in that little, lonely, wind-blown place was more like the life of a squatter. The farm consisted of two grass fields and eleven acres of arable: poor land at that; but when a man lives alone and will allow no woman in the house, all the details of living become a burden. There is the business of washing-up, of making beds, of cooking, of heating water, of keeping clean. And there were times when Wilding's soul revolted at tea-leaves and greasy plates, and the debris of dead meals, and dust and unwashed socks.

Pengelly of the sour face, who had a nasty and bitter sense of humour would poke his head round the corner of the stone barn and observe Wilding hanging up his washing on a line stretched between two of the stunted apple trees. As if that was work for a man! And why all this fuss about a disfigured face? There were no women about who cared the price of a carrot whether the man up at Orchards had two faces or none. And what did a face matter much, anyway?

Pengelly had the face of a horse. It was very full of teeth that were long and yellow, and Pengelly's wife may have had views upon faces. When the farm and its owner were under discussion, she might dare to differ from her man. Also, she was not a Cornish woman.

"Doing his own washing? Why don't 'e get someone in, poor lad?"

Poor lad indeed!

"Because he's mean. And because he's as soft as a girl about that face of his. He can't even abear the sound of a gun. And with the rabbits getting like fleas!"

Mrs. Pengelly would turn her chair a little to one side and grow silent. For on one occasion she had given way to curiosity and had sneaked up to Orchards to try and see what manner of man this Wilding was. And looking over the orchard wall she had seen him leaning against the trunk of an apple tree, just staring and staring towards the sea like a lost man looking for something beyond the horizon. While she had been watching him he had turned his head, and she had understood why St. Gilians called him the man with two faces, for the left side of his face was unmarked and as Nature had made it, the right side of ruin.

She had crouched down behind the wall, feeling shocked and pitying.

She could say to her husband: "Well, half of him is as good as a woman could want"; and Pengelly had answered her with one of his sour, cackling laughs.

"Half a man! And maybe the right half's missing."

He had an uncouth and a soiled mind.

But there were days when the soul of Tom Wilding revolted from the house and the farm and all that loneliness and drudgery, the hoeing of turnips and the washing of dishes, for a man cannot live by work alone.

He would go out and wander along the cliffs where miles of bracken and gorse and rock made a wilderness, and he saw no faces but the faces of sheep and of cattle. He would watch the wild life of those cliffs, the life of the birds, the ever-sailing and ever-complaining gulls. Sometimes he took Sally with him, but at other times he left her to watch the house.

But the soul of him was not satisfied. He was both afraid of life and hungry for it. He would sit and watch the fishing-boats of St. Gilians putting out or coming in, and he would envy those other men. He even envied the sour and swarthy Pengelly who trudged back to a cottage where a mate waited for him. While

at Orchards nothing waited for Wilding save his dog, and perhaps a pile of unwashed plates and a bed that needed making, and a fire that had gone out.

In his loneliness he found no other companionship than that of the birds and the beasts. He would have nothing shot on the farm, or upon that part of the cliff that went with the freehold of Orchards. He had had words with Pengelly.

"The rabbits will be eating us up."

But Wilding's gun was rusting in a cupboard. He would not have the rabbits shot, and Pengelly grumbled. What sort of farming was this? And were the rats to be considered sacred? Wilding had replied that the rats could be left to the farmyard cats, and that Pengelly need not worry his head about profit and loss. The growing of turnips was not the end of everything, and Wilding had a hundred-or-two pounds a year as well as his pension.

Pengelly shut his mouth and bought some snaring wire down at Penzance, and went about the business in his own way.

So it happened that the snaring of a rabbit brought a man and a girl together, though the girl had no right where she happened to be—in the grassy track leading up from the high road to Orchards Farm. It was shut in between high stone walls overgrown with foxgloves and ferns and scabious and golden rod, and the wind swept over it and left it secret.

About sunset Wilding had idled down the lane, and was leaning over the gate of the "five-acre," smoking a pipe. He was unconscious of any other living presence near him until he heard a voice, poignant and angry.

"How can you do such things?"

He stiffened and turned his head to look. He saw a tall, dark child with a dead rabbit in her arms. The noose of the wire snare was still round its neck. He was aware of a pair of large accusing eyes.

He said: "You're trespassing."

She stood and gazed, for he had turned again to the gate and was leaning upon it with an air of surliness. She saw only the undisfigured half of his face. She did not and could not know that his apparent surliness was the outward sign of a sudden sensitive shrinking, a concealing of his own ugliness from the eyes of her

youth. He had looked at her for a moment and felt the sudden shock of her beauty, the poignancy and youth of her, and he was afraid.

She said: "It was still struggling a little when I found it. I pulled the wire away. Did you set it?"

His arms pressed hard on the gate.

"No. My man did. Against my orders."

She looked at him, and stroked the dead creature's fur.

"I'm glad; I don't like things killed."

"Nor I."

"They look so happy — don't they? — with their funny little white tails." He turned his head slightly and glanced at her over his left shoulder. What a face she had! And his own scarred face seemed to be smarting.

"Yes; when you've been shot at and hit, you don't like things mauled or blown to pieces."

Her eyes seemed to open more widely. The pupils were big black circles.

"Were you ever shot at?"

"I? Oh, yes; in the War. It's not — pleasant, especially ——"

He hesitated, oppressed by that too vivid sense of his disfigurement. He had seen people shrink, look at him and shrink, though perhaps he was over-sensitive. He saw that scarred face of his each morning when he shaved; he made himself look at it, though the ugliness of it hurt him. Meanwhile he stood leaning against the gate, realizing the silence, and wondering whether she would go. Almost he wanted her to go without seeing what the War had done to him. She was so young, so unscathed, so pleasant to behold, and the very April of her hurt him.

She was still standing there. He could see the edge of her short skirt, a plain, green linen thing. Her mouth and her eyes were poignant.

"Are you Mr. Wilding?"

"Yes."

She was silent, and he understood. So she had heard. Probably she had heard him spoken of as the man with half a face; and suddenly a kind of cold rage rose in him. Was she curious? Had she come up here to look, like a prying, inquisitive child? Oh,

well, he would let her look. Did any damned thing matter? Was he afraid of the eyes of a slip of a girl?

Deliberately, and with a kind of fierceness, he turned sideways against the gate and faced her. He made himself watch her face. He expected some sign of shrinking, the betrayal of an instant repulsion, or perhaps just curiosity, a crude and youthful stare.

He made himself smile.

"Yes, a piece of shell, you know. We used to live in holes like rabbits, and I had just come up out of my hole——"

But his mocking voice died away. She was looking at him strangely; the light of the sunset was on her face and in her eyes. He saw her lips move. She just looked, but she said nothing. There was no tremor, no flinching, no polite exclaiming. Gently she stroked the fur of the dead rabbit.

He wondered. A kind of astonishment stirred in him. He cast about for something to say.

"I'll see that no more snares are set. You are Miss Farren, aren't you?"

Her large eyes looked at him. They were gentle and friendly.

"Yes. But will you?"

"Of course. I never use a gun here. As I said before — when you have been shot at and made to feel——"

She gave the slightest of shudders.

"It must have — it must have — hurt — so terribly. I'm so sorry. But it has made you kind, hasn't it?"

He looked at the dead thing in her arms.

"Sometimes — it has made me wish that I was like that."

She was shocked, but not as he would have expected her to be shocked. A kind of little cry escaped her.

"Oh, poor, poor——" She had heard the cry of a live thing in pain.

IV

MRS. TREGENNIS, Farren's housekeeper, gaunt, grave and with religion in her flat cheeks and thin lips, was sometimes moved to protest. It was her duty. She was a good woman who took life as she took her Sundays, very much in black. Seeing this long-legged girl of eighteen running wild, with her hair still blowing, or romping with a puppy on the plot of grass where the flagstaff stood, Mrs.

Tregennis felt responsible.

"Miss Iris, it is time you grew up."

"I am grown up, Nanny."

"Romping like that, and you eighteen!"

"But I must play with a puppy. He wouldn't understand my being eighteen."

Mrs. Tregennis felt it to be her duty to speak to Farren. He, too, seemed such a big boy of a man, so irresponsible, so haphazard. She tackled him one evening in the long, low, untidy room, where he smoked his pipes and threw books and cushions about and lounged on the sofa in the window. He was the sort of gentleman who threw everything on the floor. If a cushion fell on the floor, either he would leave it there or kick it back into a chair with the toe of a white canvas shoe.

"It's about Miss Iris, sir."

Farren looked at her with wilful unseriousness.

"What about Miss Iris?"

"She's eighteen, Mr. Farren; she ought to grow up."

"Why should she grow up?"

"It isn't proper, sir — in a manner of speaking."

And suddenly Farren looked fierce. He had a way of ruffling up his red hair.

"Proper! And what is growing up? Becoming a humbug! Trying to look like Sunday when you feel like Monday. I prefer my daughter as she is."

Mrs. Tregennis was obstinately good.

"But there are other people in the world."

"Damn the other people! Besides, Mrs. Tregennis, Iris isn't quite like other people. She has the eternal child in her — or whatever you call it. Something worth keeping."

"She's childish, sir. That's what worries me."

"It shouldn't do. We ought to begin to worry when the starch begins to set in us and we wear our aprons for the benefit of the people next door. We haven't any people next door."

"There's St. Gilians, sir."

"St. Gilians can go to blazes! I like the child as she is."

For St. Gilians and Mrs. Tregennis knew as little about the real Michael Farren as they knew about the life of the *Sea Horse* or

the journeys of Farren's car. No one in St. Gilians would have supposed him to be a man with a grievance against society, and a very fierce and unforgettable grievance; or that he was a man who waged a secret war against the world. St. Gilians saw only the man with the loose collar and old clothes, and the laughing, ironic eyes, a man who scattered pennies and would stand and talk to anybody, and take his drink. It knew nothing of Farren the artist of fifteen years ago, painting pictures and yet more pictures which the world would neither look at nor buy; Farren the husband of the French woman with the eyes of Iris and hair of a superlative blackness. It did not know how Farren had loved his wife, or how they had suffered the hunger and the humiliations of proud and clever people lost in the crowd. A top-floor room in Bloomsbury, an attic in Paris, struggles, shabbinesses, the birth of a child.

Then Désirée had fallen sick and had died. She had died in a miserable room somewhere in Islington, and Farren had sat by the bed; and in him had been born a cold rage against life and against society. Something had died within him with his wife. He had tried to give the world beauty, and it had thrown back at him dirt and stones. Very well — then, to hell with the social compact! Anarchy! He would do what he pleased. He would play the rebel; not stupidly and crudely, but with a kind of ironic cunning. He, too, would be as cunning as society, and just as pitiless. And there was the child. He would see to it that the child had not to bear what the mother had borne. He would use teeth and claws; he would play the tiger game while appearing among the crowd as an irresponsible dauber, a harmless fellow who did nothing but paint.

So, for some years, while appearing the most irresponsible and open of creatures he had been a man of mystery, but only to those few others and himself. Who would suspect a painter of pictures living in a bungalow on the Cornish coast of being at war with society and living upon that secret war?

V

UP AT Orchards Wilding's solitude had been disturbed as the cold sleep of the young year is broken by the first singing of a bird.

A girl's eyes and mouth grown poignant over a dead rabbit! How absurd and yet how exquisite was that pity!

Also, he had felt himself a part of that pity, included in it, but not shamefully so, for, when between them they had buried that little brown creature at the foot of a stone wall, he had felt her presence to be most strangely real and childlike. She had lingered, looking at him with darkly serious eyes, seeing him not as he saw himself, as a sort of defaced outcast, but as man wounded and still wounded. He had felt a strange tremor of incredulity and exultation. How was it that she could look at him like that, unflinchingly, just as a child looks at you, but with more than a child's understanding? For the solace of it he could have gone down and kissed her little feet.

But would he see her again? He both yearned and was afraid to see her again. She had come to him like one of those rare and perfect days in the midst of March, exquisite and unexpected; but he doubted whether there could be a second such day. If he saw her again he might discover the sensitive surface of her clouded and overcast, inevitably reflecting that which he felt to be smirched and tragic. She had been kind to him just as she had felt pity for a dead rabbit.

Meanwhile he fell upon Pengelly.

"If I find another snare set on this place, you'll go."

Pengelly glowered at him. What was the use of arguing with a man who was supposed to be a farmer and who kept a sort of home for rabbits?

"Then you had better put them fields down to grass. And there won't be a bit of green in your kitchen garden."

"We can wire it."

"Wire it and waste good money. Besides, there be neighbours. They won't thank you, Mr. Wilding, for starting a little Australia in these parts."

"We'll wait till they complain. We have wild land all round us."

"There won't be much else but wild land, I reckon."

But Pengelly, observing men and things, became aware of a change in the ex-soldier. An old army tunic was discarded; khaki collars ceased to be worn; boots and leggings received more polish. Pengelly was able to go home to his wife and announce the fact

that "he" had had his hair cut, fair and proper, by an accredited barber. Yes, Wilding had been to Penzance, and had walked the streets of Penzance in broad daylight. And was it due to the eyes of Iris Farren that it seemed to him that his disfigured face was less noticeable to the eyes of the crowd?

A restlessness possessed him. Every evening he would go down by way of the lane to the wild hillside overlooking St. Gilians. Farren's white bungalow appeared to him across the valley like a little white temple. Even the gulls seemed more restless and more plaintive. He watched for the distant figure of a girl.

Would she come Orchards-way again? What could bring her across the valley? He could not say. What would any modern girl see in a disfigured man who "pigged it," on a lonely farm, and who had nothing to offer her that modernity covets? He felt rather hopeless, like a watcher waiting for a ship that would never sail. And yet he hoped. He could not forget that something about her, an exquisite and sensitive compassion, an unspoilt virginity. Might there not be something in his loneliness that would draw her to him — their common love of wild things and of wild places? But might not Farren demur? And what sort of man was Farren? Wilding wondered.

And then one evening she appeared, and with the most unexpected of companions: Sally, the spaniel, who had been lost all day. She came up the path through the bracken, which she touched with her hands. She was hatless, bare-legged, her feet in white canvas shoes.

Wilding stood rigid, almost like a sentry on a parapet waiting to be shot at. Sally ran to put her paws against his knees.

"So — it's your dog! We made friends in the village. Isn't she a dear!"

Her face was less serious, almost laughing, and the light of her went through and through him.

"Sally? She's been away all day."

"She seemed to want me to come back with her."

"I don't blame Sally."

With a strange feeling of exultation he bent down and fondled the dog. For it seemed to him that Farren's daughter had no more fear of him than had the spaniel; she looked at him with the eyes

of a bird; she saw in him nothing hideous, nothing to be fled from.

He had a moment of marvelling. Was it that he had grown oversensitive, too much afraid of his fellowmen, or was it that the eyes and the soul of her were different? He took the spaniel into his arms.

He said: "A dog keeps you from being too lonely. Funny — isn't it — how a dog will stick by you and desert all the rest of the dog world?"

She seemed to stand and consider him as though she had found something new and strange in life.

"But you don't live alone?"

"Yes, quite alone."

"But who cooks and makes your bed?"

Her question seemed to amuse him and also to fill him with surprise.

"I'm my own cook and housemaid. Yes, plenty of work with a farm and a house on your hands."

"But don't you feel lonely?"

"Oh, sometimes. One gets used to things. Besides — I think I like birds and beasts better than people."

Her face lit up suddenly.

"Now isn't that strange! So do I. I love to be out — in wild places all by myself, watching and watching. You see so much when you are alone."

He looked at her and wondered.

"Yes, that's true; when you don't want to catch or kill."

VI

IRIS stood on the running-board of her father's car, for Farren was off upon one of his expeditions, with an old suitcase and his artist's gear loaded in the dicky of the two-seater. In the old days Iris the child had perplexed him with the same question — "Can't I come with you, Daddy?" — and always he had had to put her off. "Little girls must stay at home." And perhaps that was one of the reasons why he wished her to remain a child, a creature whose questions could be answered with an air of Olympian mystery; for had she asked these questions as a woman, the answering

of them would have been difficult. Always he had given her to understand that he went away to paint in the Cotswold country, or in Wiltshire villages, and that sometimes he stayed with an eccentric friend, a country doctor. Farren had invented "Dr. Brough," and had told the child tales of that gentleman's whimsicalities until, to Iris Farren, "Dr. Brough," had become a reality.

"Can't I come and see Dr. Brough, Daddy?"

"Some day, Poppet. But Dr. Brough doesn't like things in petticoats."

"Then couldn't I go without a petticoat?"

Now, at the age of eighteen, she did not perplex him with awkward questions, nor was there anything in her silence that suggested the reticence of sophistication. She did not make Farren feel that she wondered where he went and why, or that she doubted the existence of "Dr. Brough." Her eyes and her brow remained clear at an age when most young things would have accepted with cynicism a pilgrimage to the shrine of a pretty lady. She just stood on the running-board of the car and was carried up the grassy lane as far as the main road, and there Farren would stop the car for a moment, and she would bend over and kiss him.

"Good-bye, Daddy!"

"Good-bye, Poppet. Take care of yourself. Back on Thursday."

Always he was conscious of a pang when leaving her on the grass bank beside the road. She was so innocent, so unsmirched, so unsuspicious. She believed in his romancings, as her forebears had believed in the Bible; and Farren felt this pang on that serene morning in June when he waved a hand to her and set the nose of the grey car towards the notch in the blue sky where the road went over Hogback Hill. For he had come to the age when a man realizes that life is finite and that certain things do not go on for ever. He had loved this other secret life largely for the sake of Iris the child, but he was growing more and more aware of Iris the woman.

Also, he was becoming more and more oppressed by the dread of disaster, by the mischance of a betrayal. His nerve was not what it had been, his audacity and his adventurousness were less youthful. He was feeling less bitter against the world, because life had been more kind to him in the flowering of an exquisite childhood, and the poison was thinning in his blood. More and more he had begun

to dread the possibility of being found out: and not so much for his own sake, but for Iris's sake. Society, enraged and merciless, might turn and rend him before he had set out to accomplish that which he had in his mind.

Farren drove fast. He had need of speed, for his goal was London and not the solitudes of the Wiltshire hills. Even a year ago he could remember enjoying the speed of the road, the rush to the great city; but now he was less a lover of speed. He would find himself flinching, or imagining a smash, and perhaps the inevitable discovery of that package stowed away inside what pretended to be an innocent looking tool-box. He had not yet saved enough money to make his child independent of all sensationalism.

After driving hard all day he reached the outskirts of London as the June dusk fell. His inconspicuous grey car inserted itself into the multitudinous traffic, threading its way along one of the strands of the great web.

Keeping to a series of obscure streets, he turned at last into a Kensington mews and ran the car into a coach-house that was always at his service. He transferred something to his suitcase. With a portfolio under his arm and the suitcase in his right hand he made his way to a certain quiet, private hotel — "Bland's," in March Street. Bland's and its porter had known him for years as Farren the artist, up in Town with his portfolio and on business of his own — a quiet gentleman in spite of his red hair.

Next morning he strolled. He carried a book and a daily paper. He made his way into Kensington Gardens and sat down to watch the children sailing boats on the Round Pond. He had the appearance of an idle man amusing himself. He got up and strolled over the grass and among the trees and the scattered chairs. With an air of detachment he sat down on a chair under a tree near to an old lady in black who was occupying another chair. The old lady had a Pekinese dog in her lap. She looked as decorous and respectable as the Gardens.

Farren observed the dog. He snapped his fingers at it playfully. Conversation was opened.

"The Gardens are looking very well this year."

"Yes; I have never seen them look better. Did you see the tulips when they were out?"

"Yes — gorgeous!"

They grew friendly. Farren moved his chair next to the old lady's. She had a bag with a book in it. Farren played with the dog. The old lady noticed the book he was carrying: yes, she read a great deal. She held out her hand for Farren's book, and looked at the title.

"Is it good?"

"Fascinating."

She produced the book from her bag.

"You should read that. Most interesting."

"I'll get it from the library."

Yet few close observers, had there been anyone to observe an old lady and a middle-aged man chatting together under an isolated tree, would have noticed that Farren and the owner of the Pekinese exchanged volumes, and that Farren's book went into the old lady's bag.

They parted, the old lady leading off the Pekinese to take a taxi in Queen's Gate, which carried her to No. 7 Gatherall Gardens, in Chelsea. The house, one of a row, high, narrow, with a blue door and white windows, looked as innocent and conventional as the old lady. She rang the bell and was admitted by a sallow and insignificant little man-servant whom she addressed as "John."

"Lunch nearly ready, John?"

"Yes, madam."

"Take Peter and put him on his cushion. I shall be down in a minute."

Carrying her bag, she ascended briskly to her bedroom and, opening a big cupboard, disclosed a small safe. She unlocked the safe, but before placing Farren's book inside she examined the volume. It was more than a mere book, for a cavity had been cut in its pages, and in this cavity lay concealed a neat white package.

Meanwhile Farren had remained under the tree, reading the daily paper, the book that the old lady had left him tucked between his knees. Presently he glanced at his watch, yawned, slipped the book between the folds of the paper, got up, and strolled out of Kensington Gardens. He lunched at Bland's Hotel. After lunch he went out with his portfolio under his arm, and he was away till six o'clock. Bland's Hotel understood that he visited editors and publishers and submitted sketches, and that he did a good

deal in the way of designing book-wrappers.

At dinner he was invariably cheerful, and had the air of a man whose affairs had prospered. He would joke with old Hammond, the head-waiter, who had been at Bland's for more than twenty years. "Well, Hammond, how's the world going?"

"It's getting much too noisy, sir."

"I agree with you. All motor-cars and flesh-coloured stockings!"

Next morning he breakfasted at eight, paid his bill, and went off with his suitcase and portfolio to embark in the grey car.

VII

WHEN Farren was away, Iris felt lonely; but it was not loneliness that brought her to the gate of Orchards. For if she had roused something in Tom Wilding, he, too, had stirred elemental things in her.

That was the wonder of it, and to Wilding a reason for exquisite torture and suspense. He was full of fear. Would she come again to the farm on the hill? He would watch for her in his garden, or from under the shadow of one of the wind-blown trees; for she was life, and for years now he had been afraid of life.

But she came. He had strolled down the lane to the gate where the wild of bracken and bramble was separated from the pasture by a stone wall. He opened the gate and passed through, and he was half-way down the hillside when he saw her among the ferns and the furze. He was afraid, most absurdly afraid; his impulse was to turn and run; but she had seen him: she was waving.

He stood and waited for her, and during that moment of suspense he found himself wishing that he could have set the years aside and have met her as he had been before the War. She came swiftly up the hill to him, and he noticed that her black hair hung straight and wet; she was a little flushed and out of breath.

"I've been bathing."

Instinctively he had turned so that the disfigured part of him should be hidden from her, and she noticed it and was touched. She had divined his sensitiveness and his shrinking, and she understood it; but why should he flinch from her? There was nothing about him that made her flinch.

He said: "Isn't it rather dangerous?"

"Oh, I could swim when I was seven, and I know the currents. I want to dry my hair."

She smiled at him. There was something elvish about her this morning, a touch of playfulness. She lifted her hair with her hands, and then shook it, and smiled again.

"Let's sit in the sun."

He was trembling just as the War, in its most ghastly moments, had made him shake a little at the knees.

"Do you know the Maiden Rock?"

"No."

"It's on my bit of cliff. A wonderful place right up against the sky. Last month it was all bluebells and pink thrift."

"Let's go. Show me."

They went, wandering through the young bracken and between banks of furze, and again she noticed that he walked at her right side so that the disfigured half of his face was hidden; and suddenly she was aware of a different feeling towards him. She wanted to see the whole of him, and not the half. She was not afraid of that other part of him, and she wanted him to understand that she was not afraid.

"How I love these cliffs."

"Do you? So do I."

There was silence between them till they came to a strip of turf sloping upwards to a pile of rock. It was like a natural tower on the very edge of the cliff, a little grassy platform surrounded by grey battlements, and above and below an illimitable blueness spread itself, the blueness of sea and sky. Gulls sailed to and fro, calling to each other. From below came the sound of the sea.

She stood very still for a moment, gazing, her hands folded over her bosom.

"Wonderful. Almost one feels like one of the gulls."

"Floating between sea and sky."

"Yes. Let's sit on the rocks, right on the very edge."

"You don't mind heights?"

"I? No. Why should I?"

Beside him on the grey crags she shook out her wet hair to the sea wind, and watched the gulls, and all that blueness of sea and

sky; and Wilding, that man of solitudes and suffering, sat and wondered at her, as though he doubted her reality. On the horizon a steamer trailed a smudge of smoke, and nearer in the sails of fishing-boats looked like sharp rocks jutting out of the sea.

For a while she sat there very solemnly and in silence, her eyes at gaze. It was as though she looked from this height at familiar things and found them changed, and was a little troubled and perplexed. The fingers of her right hand stroked the grey surface of the rock. Her eyes had a stillness.

Suddenly she asked a question.

"Why do they call it the Maiden Rock?"

"Some tale about a girl."

"Tell me."

"They say that a very long while ago a girl used to watch for the coming of a ship, because her lover was in that ship."

"Yes."

"She watched and watched, and the ship never came."

"And then?"

"One day she threw herself into the sea."

"Because she was so unhappy?"

"And lonely."

She was silent for a while, looking down at the sea, and her hair, now that the wind had dried it, was blown about a little. It gave a suggestion of movement to her still face. Her eyes were compassionate.

"It must be terrible — such loneliness. When Daddy goes away, even for three days, I feel quite lost."

"But then you know that he will come back."

"Oh, yes."

Her hand stroked the grey rock.

"Do you come here often?"

"Pretty often."

"Because you are lonely?"

"Perhaps. And one doesn't meet people here — people who stare."

She turned her head quickly and looked at him.

"Does it hurt?"

"It did. I suppose one's a fool to be so sensitive."

"But it doesn't hurt you when I look?"

His hands gripped his knees.

"No, not now. But at first I was afraid."

"Afraid?"

"That you would run away, you know, and never come back."

VIII

A FULL moon rising in the east laid a track of silver across the open sea. The *Sea Horse* was running south, far from the land, with a white curve of foam at her prow and her wash like the white scut of a rabbit. The air was light, and the long and lazy heave of the sea was like quicksilver; and of such a night at sea Farren had made many pictures and had shown them to the jerseyed men of St. Gilians.

"How's that for a full-moon night?"

Yes, Farren could sketch the sea; though he did not see it as the Cornishmen saw it: as something fatal and sinister, smudged with scuds of rain, and suddenly grey and ominous. He and the *Sea Horse* saw it mostly in fairish weather, when a fast boat could travel without swamping herself. He sat in the stern, with a sou'-wester pulled down over his eyes, and gleaming in the moonlight rather like a helmet. Sometimes he stood up and scanned the vast, silvery distance. Clock, compass, and the spread of the boat kept him wise as to the *Sea Horse's* position.

The moon was half-way towards the zenith when he saw that which he expected to see — the silhouette of a fishing-boat with no sails set, but driven by its auxiliary screw. The boat showed a sudden blinking light on its beam. The *Sea Horse* headed for it, swept close in, slackened its speed, and glided alongside like a greyhound running beside a horse.

A voiced hailed Farren in French.

"All correct?"

"All correct."

As the *Sea Horse* ran level and within a fathom of the boat, a package was thrown into her, and Farren tossed something back.

"*Bon voyage!*"

"*Bon nuit!*"

The laconic interview in mid-channel ended there. The *Sea Horse*

sheered off and turned her nose northwards. The fishing-boat plugged on with the chug-chug of her engine growing fainter and fainter. Meanwhile, Farren, with the tiller under one arm, dealt with that package, ripping off the canvas cover and the padding, and stowing away the packages in the sag of his shirt, and under the bulge of his white sweater. He was a big man, and wore his clothes loose and free.

The canvas and packing went overboard. And well before dawn, while St. Gilians was asleep, the motor-boat glided in to her moorings, and the little white dinghy took Farren ashore. If anyone saw him, the eccentric timing of such a cruise was ascribed to the eccentricities of a man who painted pictures and went about without a hat, and had a daughter who was not quite like other women.

There were other things that Farren concealed besides the adventures of the *Sea Horse* and his expeditions to Town and his meetings with the old lady in black. In the roof of the bungalow of St. Gilians there was an attic reached by a trap-door in the ceiling of Farren's studio, and beyond the reach of anyone but a tall man standing on the top of a step-ladder. Farren's ascents into this dark, cobwebby place followed upon a cruise in the *Sea Horse,* or preceded a journey to Town. He would choose an hour when Mrs. Tregennis had gone shopping and Iris was out on the cliffs.

On this particular morning he set up his step-ladder, ascended it, pushed the wooden trap back on its hinges and disappeared into the dark void. He had a candle and matches with him. He was rummaging about when he heard a voice, Iris's voice.

"Daddy, what — are — you — doing?"

She had climbed the steps and had managed to get her hands on the edge of the floor-boards above, and was tip-toeing, her dark head visible to her father.

"Hallo!"

He had been putting something away behind a pile of old canvases, for the attic was full of the pictures that Farren had painted and never sold.

"Nothing to see up here, young woman, but dust and spiders."

He blew out the candle, and then heard the crash of the overturned step-ladder, for Iris, tip-toeing too eagerly, had caused the thing to slant and slide. She was left clinging by hands to the edge

of the trap's opening.

"Oh — pull me up, Daddy!"

Farren got her by the wrists and drew her up until she was able to get her knees against the timber framing and work a foot over the edge.

"Well, Miss Mischief, that's what comes of spying!"

He was jocular.

"And you have torn a hole in your stocking. And your poor father will have to jump and recover the steps."

She was gazing about her in the dimness of the attic, for though Farren had blown out the candle, there was light enough for her to see the stacked canvases. The edges and corners of them stuck out of the darkness, while against one wall a dim portrait in a gilded frame peered like a ghostly face.

"Nothing but old pictures, kiddie — a sort of mausoleum."

"Your pictures, Daddy?"

"I was guilty of painting them years and years ago. Now the spiders spin webs."

Somehow she looked very grave over all those wasted canvases, the ghosts of her father's past, while he, letting himself down almost with the suppleness of a boy, swung himself to the floor, set up the step-ladder, and, climbing it, held up his arms.

"Now then; let yourself down: I'll catch you."

But she stood above, looking solemn and troubled.

"Why don't you sell all those pictures, Daddy?"

"Some of them are portraits of your mother, my dear, and bad at that. I painted those pictures when I was very young. Now, down you come."

She let herself down into his arms, and when he had set her on her feet, he went up and closed the trap-door.

"That's the way one should treat one's failures. Shut them up. We are pretty dusty. We had better go and bathe."

IX

SO MUCH solitude should have made Wilding greedy of life when it came to him; but a man who is loth to kill or to take has travelled beyond the little greedinesses of the world's children. That Farren's

daughter should be drawn to Orchards Farm was both wonderful and yet insufficient, for already he had come to realize the innocence of her, and how different she was from the ruck of humanity. They climbed the cliffs together, and lay in the bracken and watched the gulls. Also there was the farm, and Sally, and the three cows, and Bob, the horse, and the pigs and the chickens and the farm cats. Iris thought the farm adorable. She could say to Wilding, "How you must love it all!"

He did, but now he was loving it differently. He loved it with her and for her, but he was aware of the sly, sour face of Pengelly. He had a question on his lips, and he was not happy until he had asked it.

"Does your father know you come here?"

"Oh, yes."

For Farren knew, and had a day of doubt and of jealousy. The thing was so new in the life of Iris the child, and, like a child, she had not concealed it.

"I have been watching the cows being milked, Daddy."

Farren had realized a pang of jealousy. Who was this Wilding, this man who had come back from the War with half a face, and who lived alone up among those twisted apple trees? What manner of man was he? Farren's blue eyes stared. But he saw this new happening with the eyes of a man who had lost some of his recklessness and his passion, if not with resignation, with some understanding of heights and precipices. The life at the bungalow could not go on for ever, and into Farren's consciousness had crept the strange feeling that disaster was not far from him. He had lost some of his nerve. He was worried, suspicious, anxious. He had a feeling that he was being watched.

And if the disastrous thing happened, what then? He could not be blind to the future; he could not take love with him into that dark and mysterious place. Iris was life. He would want her left somewhere in the sunlight, unknowing and unsuspecting, but not alone.

Wilding was scything the rough grass in the orchard when Farren's resolve took him up the hill to Orchards Farm. Meeting Pengelly in the lane, he stopped and spoke to him.

"Mr. Wilding about?"

Pengelly grinned. So here was the girl's father arrived with a thick stick!

"He's in the orchard, mowing."

Farren walked on. He came to the stone wall of the orchard and saw Wilding in among the trees, swinging his scythe with steady measured rhythm; and Farren stood to watch him. The thing was as old as time; it had a peacefulness and inevitableness; it was like love and the bearing of children, and the fruit of the vine, and harvest. The grass purred to the steel, and Wilding, all unconscious of being watched, swung his strong shoulders and moved forward step by step. He was in his shirt sleeves; his arms were brown; his hat threw a shadow across his face. And the unscarred side of it was towards Farren, and it wore an expression of gentleness, of meditative contentment. The man was at peace with his work, and the work was clean.

A softness came into Farren's eyes. His lips moved.

"And the mower shall go forth to mow."

His resolution came to him. It was ripe like the grass.

"Mr. Wilding."

Wilding had paused to hone the scythe. He turned sharply, the scythe in one hand, the stone in the other. His face was shaded by a tree.

"Good morning. It's Mr. Farren?"

"Yes."

"I'm rather glad."

He hung his scythe in one of the trees, and laid the stone in the fork of the same tree. His movements were easy and deliberate and Farren the artist knew — as a man knows some things instinctively — that one who could move so easily when surprised at his work was of the same metal as his scythe. Also, that scarred face had a strange attractiveness to the few who were tired of gazing upon the obvious faces of the crowd. It had sent no shudder through Farren's daughter, and to Farren that was a fact of infinite significance.

They looked at each other, and Wilding put on his coat.

"Do you care to come inside? Or perhaps you like the open."

"It is good enough here, with the smell of that grass."

"Yes, that's one of the good things — not like the stink of motor-

bikes. Country smells."

He raised himself to the top of the stone wall and sat astride it and close to Farren, who leaned with his arms crossed on the stones.

"I'm glad you've come, sir. Otherwise I was coming to you. I wondered whether——"

"Oh, yes; I knew."

"That's good. I've nothing to hide. But wondered whether you knew, and how you felt. You see, she's as innocent as God's earth. It makes a man marvel."

"Yes, she's that. You found that out."

He passed a hand over his red hair. How strange it was that he and this other man should be speaking of Iris as though they had known her and each other for years, and with the knowledge of understanding. He felt very near to Wilding, near as man to man.

"It's a rather precious virtue."

"Precious, sir, and dangerous. She comes here and runs wild as she pleases. She loves all live things. It's difficult to say to her——"

"Just what?"

"Just what the world says or might say."

"Ah, the dirty old sensual world! I've thought of that for years. A man does when he has a girl like that. Sex has a sort of horror. Some things hurt, rend one. She's so utterly clean."

Wilding seemed to be looking at the mown grass under the apple trees streaked with sunlight.

"You must be rather proud of it. Artist's work. To have painted such a live picture!"

Farren's head went up.

"Good Lord! — you understand that! Well, why not? Only most men are such beasts — thoughtless beasts."

"Well — I've suffered. It makes you think. There is nothing that I want to kill or to hurt. And yet one has to kill to eat, and to love — to have children. But that can be clean as the earth is clean, when man's garbage is left out."

Farren put out a sudden hand.

"Well — I'm not feeling little. I'm not all the earth. It won't hurt her to come up here."

"That's rather great of you, sir. And may I come across to your

place?"

"Of course."

X

ABOUT that time the police raided a dubious house in Elgin Street, Soho, and finding — among other matters — a little store of white snuff, followed up the indication. A little frightened Italian and his wife were tactfully questioned. The woman, a black-browed, obdurate and truculent creature, had more courage than her husband, and glared like a stubborn animal; but the man, a scared monkey, was made to chatter.

"Cocaine, sir? I knowa not'ing at all-a — not'ing."

But he was persuaded to blab something of what he knew, under the assurance that life might be made more easy for him if he gave the gang away. They got him in a room by himself, away from his truculent and defiant wife, and gave him cigarettes to smoke, and treated him like a pet monkey. Inevitably he was persuaded to talk, and to declare that he was the most innocent of men, that he had been a waiter at Gagliani's for three years, and that he had not known that the stuff was in the house.

Yes, his wife had friends, certainly. All sorts of people. Name them? Well, he couldn't put names to all of them. There was a little old lady who called on them once a month and saw his wife, a most harmless old lady. Yes, his wife dealt occasionally in cheap jewellery and old clothes.

The house in Elgin Street was ordered to carry on as though nothing had occurred. The Italian woman, sitting stubbornly and flatly in her chair, glared and knew herself to be caged. The house would be watched. Antonio would be watched; even at Gagliani's a detective would be assisting in serving the restaurant's clients. So the police left the trap baited, with a cat in the house, and other cats in observation-posts. The little old lady in black, venturing unsuspecting from Gatherall Gardens, was observed, listened to, and followed home. An hour later the search-warrant was produced and the house in Gatherall Gardens turned upside down.

The police found things and among them a book lying on a table in the drawing-room. It was a perfectly harmless book on fifteenth-century Italian art; but on the fly-leaf was written the name of the

owner — one "Michael Farren." The little old lady was a stout soul. She sat on the sofa and smiled and shook her head, and kept her loyalties, while the Peke stared with glassy and scornful eyes at an eminent police-inspector and his assistant.

"I see you borrow books, madam."

"Oh, no; that book belongs to me."

"Left you by a relation?"

"I bought it second-hand at a shop in Oxford Street."

"Recently, I suppose?"

"No, some years ago. I quite forget the name of the shop."

But the police took the book away. The inspector had noticed passages marked and notes scribbled on the margins. Obviously the book had belonged to an artist or to someone interested in pictures and in the history of art; and all clues are worthy of attention. Michael Farren. Now who was Michael Farren and where did he live and what did he do, and had the old lady been telling the truth? The inspector had no illusions.

Nor did Farren receive the whisper of a warning, for the old lady of Gatherall Gardens was the only person on his side of the Channel who knew just how the drug came into England, and she was unable to warn him, being gently in durance. And yet about that very time Farren began to suffer from strange restlessness and depression. It was as though he was fey, and had some super-normal feeling of what was in the air.

Also, he was sleeping badly, and waking one morning before dawn and knowing that there was no more sleep for him that night, he got up and went out. The sea was streaked with a faint greyness, and going to the edge of the cliff he could look down upon St. Gilians and its bay, and the little harbour where the *Sea Horse* lay moored.

Rows and rows of gulls were perched on the boats, and upon the iron railings of the breakwater, and to Farren the whole scene would have lacked any personal significance had he not seen a dinghy lying beside the *Sea Horse*.

For a moment he stood staring, and then threw himself down on the dew-wet grass. He wanted to watch without being seen. Someone had boarded the *Sea Horse,* and presently he saw a man emerge from the fore cabin of the motor-boat and get into the

dinghy and row away. The man did not make for St. Gilians. The sea was a flat calm, and the man in the dinghy pulled out past the sea-wall and away towards Gurnard's Head. Another boat was lying there.

Farren rose to his knees, and then slowly got to his feet. He knew that there had been nothing on the *Sea Horse* to incriminate him, and that the fellow in the dinghy might be nothing but a sneak-thief.

He went back to the bungalow, as daylight was spreading. Putting off his shoes, and silently turning a handle, he entered his daughter's room. Iris was asleep; she did not stir; and for half a minute he stood beside her bed, looking down at her.

"Innocent. Let her stay like that."

He slipped silently out of her room feeling that he would have to slip just as silently out of her life and leave her dreaming and alone. But not quite alone. For there was Wilding to be remembered, and Farren had come to know Wilding and Orchards Farm. Both the place and the man had changed; Pengelly's wife came in each day to clean and scrub; the garden was ceasing to look like a wilderness; new curtains had appeared at the windows.

Farren went out again and watched the sun rise out of the sea. It seemed so strange that he — a man who loved beauty — should be standing there as one whom society would regard as an enemy. But how final the thing was! Always had he made himself confront the possible disaster and its implications; long ago he had made up his mind that he would vanish, that he would not be taken and caged. He would disappear before the net could be pulled tight.

But how strange it was!

A restlessness possessed him; he wanted to know, to feel sure; and he could not be sure unless he went to see for himself how things were at Gatherall Gardens. Had anything happened to the little old lady and to Peter the Peke? And again he was oppressed by the strangeness of it all, the anomalous and ambiguous life he had been living all these years. But he had had his reasons; he still had his reason.

The decision came to him suddenly. He would go to town that very day; he would get the car out at once. He would slip away

before Iris and Mrs. Tregennis were awake. And that was what he did.

Iris, knocking at her father's door, called to him to come and bathe.

"Daddy, the sea's like glass. Come along."

But Farren's room was empty, and the open doors of the wooden garage offered other explanations. She went in to Mrs. Tregennis, who was laying the table for breakfast.

"Daddy's gone with the car."

Mrs. Tregennis was accustomed to such whimsical disappearances.

"Just one of his moods, my dear."

"I wish he would take me with him sometimes."

Mrs. Tregennis was wondering whether she would have to prepare lunch for two. Irresponsible people who painted pictures could be rather perplexing.

So Iris had to bathe alone, and afterwards she climbed the hill to Orchards Farm. She came and went as she pleased, and even Pengelly had ceased to smirk and to sneer. She would address him as "Mr. Pengelly." "Oh, Mr. Pengelly, what lovely pigs you've got!" Wilding might be out with hoe or scythe, and suddenly he would hear her voice.

"Wildie—Wildie! Where are you?"

Perhaps he would see her perched on a stone wall among the golden rod and the blue scabious, or waving to him from one of the field gates. She would leap down, run to him, and touch him; and to be touched by her was an exquisite, sweet pain. There was so much of the Rima in her, the bird creature, and he was afraid lest some rough gesture of his should scare her away.

"Wildie, do let me try and scythe!"

He showed her how to hold the scythe, and tried to teach her the swing of body and shoulders; but her mowing was not very successful.

"Wildie, why do I always dig the point into the ground?"

"One does, to begin with. You are not made to be Father Time."

"I'm better at hoeing."

"You are."

"We're just like Adam and Eve, aren't we?"

"You are."

She was to him a kind of exquisite Persephone. He could understand Farren's summing up of life. "Grow apples, my lad, and turnips. What a lot of paint I have wasted! Look at that child, the only decent picture I have helped to paint. Thank God it can't be hung in a gallery!"

XI

FARREN followed the usual routine, yet with the strange feeling of a man performing some useless yet inevitable ceremony. He put up at the Bland's Hotel. The night had turned out wet, and after dinner he strolled out towards Chelsea. He was tired after all those miles on the road, and the tenseness of his speeding; and London had a muffled yet grotesque unreality. Its noise was no more than the buzzing of a fly in a bottle. The wet streets had an oily sheen, and the drizzle seemed to break up the rays of the lamps and to scatter them.

Crossing King's Road, he passed a constable on point-duty, his wet cape glistening. He seemed to loom big and sententious, a symbolical figure; and for the first time in his life Farren felt moved to edge away from this fellow-man dressed up in society's uniform. His impulse was to slink; and the meanness of it angered him. No, surely, he would not suffer himself to be taken by the collar like the absurd enemy of an absurd tyranny in which beauty was banned and beer raised to the peerage.

He arrived at the end of Gatherall Gardens. No. 7 was on the left, and Farren proceeded along the opposite pavement with the air of a man passing through to other streets. The windows of No. 7 were dark, but he noticed that the blinds were up. Someone had lacked imagination. Farren walked on, crossed the road and came back. It had seemed to him that No. 7 had winked a sinister and warning eye. Moreover, coincidence was in his favour, for as he was about to pass the door, a constable in uniform emerged from the house.

Farren walked past with his hands in his pockets and his head in the air. The indication was sufficient. But why a constable in uniform? Why not some ordinary-looking individual in a ready-made suit? Possibly police mentality was ready-made.

He laughed. He felt like a gladiator in the arena. He saluted

society.

"Hail, Cæsar! One who is not respectable is about to die!"

But a sudden weariness fell upon him. It was a part of the feeling of fatalism that had been deepening in him during the last days. The adventure of life was near its end, and its finale would be abrupt and silent; but on this wet London night he felt the clogging of his tired body. He wanted to sleep, to forget; and going back to Bland's Hotel, he slept as some soldiers can sleep with the inevitable to-morrow and its battle before them.

Next day, speeding through all that English country, he understood that he was saying farewell to the green world that slipped past him, the downland and the beech woods, and all those smooth fields, the gardens and the orchards. He was like a man travelling in a swift train to some port to take ship for a strange land. He felt both resigned and restless. It was growing dark when he reached the moorland road above St. Gilians, and he stopped the car on the grass, switched off the lights, and went down to the bungalow on foot. He was suspicious.

There were lights in the bungalow windows. He slipped over the fence and crossing the grass to the studio window, looked in. Iris was curled up on the sofa, reading a book. Farren tapped on the glass.

Her startled eyes looked straight into his, for Farren's face was close to the window.

"Daddy!"

She rushed to meet him, and opening the glazed door leading into the garden, threw her arms about him.

"Why didn't you tell us you were going?"

He kissed her. He was his old whimsical, jocular self.

"What a memory I have! Thought I'd left a note. Didn't I?"

"No."

"Anyone been?"

"Yes; two strange men called this afternoon. I told them you were away. They were funny. I saw them looking into the garage."

"What sort of men?"

"Oh, just strangers in ordinary clothes."

"Called for a subscription, perhaps. Did they say they would come again?"

"No; but when I was on the cliff this evening, I saw one of them lying in the bracken."

Farren laughed.

"Cadgers of some sort. I expect they have sheered off. But you can't guess what I have done?"

"What have you done?"

"Run out of petrol, Poppet. I had to leave the car up the road. I'm going to carry a can up and bring her down. Stay here and get me some supper."

He stroked her hair.

"Seen Wildie to-day?"

"No. I was waiting for you."

"Bless you!"

He left her, and, walking on the grass, he made towards the garage, and stopped to listen. Iris's two strangers might be watching the place, but there was no sound save the faint and distant surge of the sea. Farren took a can of petrol from the garage, and walked up the hill to the car. He did not turn on the lights or start the engine, but let the car run slowly down the hill, and on to the cinder track leading to the garage. He left the car there, and entered the bungalow.

"Wonderful night, Poppet. It was raining in Wiltshire yesterday, but to-night there is going to be a moon. Ah, supper! Good! Where's Mrs. Tregennis?"

"It's her night out, Daddy. She's down at St. Gilians."

"One good gossip a week. Had supper?"

"Yes."

He was hungry; he sat down to cold meat and a salad, and one of Mrs. Tregennis's fruit-tarts; and though he reflected, as he ate the food, that it promised to be his last supper, he could smile at his daughter. That, indeed, was his last sacrament—to go out smiling and in secret, leaving her to that other man. He looked at her from under the grizzle of his eyebrows with a kind of fierce and ironic tenderness. She sat in her chair at the other end of the table just as her mother had sat; she had the same way of looking round-eyed and serious, and of holding her head slightly on one side.

"So you haven't seen Wildie to-day?"

"No."

"There are men and men, Poppet. We are all of us patchwork creatures, but there is good stuff in Wildie. Not afraid of him, are you?"

"Afraid! Why should I be afraid?"

"That's all right then. He's been hurt. He doesn't want to kill things or hurt them. That's religion, my dear. Well, the fact is I'm rather sleepy, and so are you."

"A little, Daddy."

"Run along, then. Ten whiffs at a pipe and I shall turn in. I suppose Mrs. Tregennis has the backdoor key."

"Yes."

"Well, kiss the old fellow good night."

He held her for a moment, and it seemed to Iris that he was holding her differently. He kissed her hair and her forehead. For her face was also her mother's face, and Farren's good night was farewell to a memory.

"My little girl is going to dream. Don't wake up. Only the too wise people wake up. Good night, blessed one."

When she had gone, he bit hard at the stem of his pipe, and his face had a twisted look. An old oak bureau stood in a corner; he went to it, took a sheet of notepaper and wrote a few words. It was his last message, a pretence, a saving gesture.

"Gone out in the boat. Woke early. Back to late breakfast. Love to Poppet.—M. F."

He heard Mrs. Tregennis come in, potter about in the kitchen and then go to her room. In a little while the bungalow was silent, and Farren tucked the note under a glass on the table. Someone would find it there in the morning.

XII

LIKE most men who lead an open-air life or who work hard on the land, Wilding turned in early; but on such a night as this, when Orion and the Great Bear were blazing and not a leaf moved, and the sound of the sea was like the murmur heard in the hollow

of a shell, he went out and wandered a while before going to his bed. The starlight was sufficient, and he had gone down the lane to look at the lights of Farren's bungalow across the valley. He was returning and had reached the gate in the garden wall when he heard footsteps.

They were a man's steps, and at first he thought it might be Pengelly. But Pengelly was a clumsy walker, and this man's steps had solidity and swiftness. Wilding, head up, sent out a challenge:

"Hallo! Who's that?"

A voice answered him.

"That you, Wilding? Good! I was afraid you might have locked up."

"Mr. Farren!"

"Yes; can I come in? You and I have things to say to each other."

He loomed up out of the darkness; he was bare-headed; he seemed part of the big, loose-limbed, star-spread night. And Wilding's surprise waited upon this unexpected coming. He opened the gate and stood aside.

"Nothing wrong, sir?"

Farren did not answer that question. He walked up the path and stood in silence outside the farmhouse door; and his silence had some of the profoundness of the night. Wilding had left the lamp burning in his sitting-room. In passing Farren to lead the way in, he heard a sound come from the other man — a deep-drawn breath and a sigh.

"Soon be lights out, Wildie."

He called him by the name Iris used, and in the darkness of the passage Wilding felt himself suddenly and intimately near to this other man.

"When you can sleep, turning out a light is not a bad thing."

"Ah, when you can sleep. Mind if I smoke? Last pipe or two, you know, my lad."

Wilding did not know, and yet Farren's voice was so strangely and inexplicably ominous that he looked at him in astonishment.

"Many more pipes for you, sir. Why not?"

"No."

"Something wrong? You're ill?"

"No. My number is up, Wildie. I'll sit here. Don't let's have too

much light. I have a confession to make. And then I want you to promise me something."

He sat down on the sofa by the window and filled his pipe, and Wilding, before turning down the lamp, noticed that Farren's hands were deliberate and steady.

"How's that?"

"Splendid! Let's start straight away. When I leave you, I'm going out in the *Sea Horse,* and I am not coming back."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not coming back. I shall sink her out in the Channel and go down with her. It will appear an accident. That's all."

Wilding stood and stared.

"What on earth are you talking about, sir?"

"Fate, my lad, fate. That is what is going to happen."

"But why?"

"I am going to tell you why."

"But Iris! You can't do it!"

"It's because of Iris that I am doing it, Wildie. There's a moment in some lives when a man comes to the edge of things. I'm there now. I'm going over."

And there in that quiet farmhouse room, with the lamp turned low and both their pipes smoking, Wilding listened to Farren's story. "I was an artist, my lad, and the world used a boot on me. I thought I would get even with the world. Do you know what it means to be poor — dirtily and shamefully poor — to see your wife shabby and thin and with frightened eyes? She died in a dirty room, she who was made for niceness and beauty. She was French. And then I saw red. I wanted to get my claws into the smug face of the money-making world.

"I wasn't going to let my child know the same sort of sordid show. Yes, I was down and under just then, down in the underworld where all sorts of queer things happen. I met a strange little doctor who had the same sort of rage against the respectable as I had. We met in a dirty night-club in Paris. Oh, yes; the Paris underworld, not the tourists' underworld, where silly fools from the suburbs think they are being devilish dogs. The little doctor wanted to have his jest; so did I — but I wanted money. And the gang over there wanted a link in the chain. Smuggling; contraband;

stuff that was worth while. I became that link."

"What stuff, Farren?"

"You may as well know. Cocaine."

For a little while there was silence between them. They did not look at each other. Then Farren, speaking very slowly between pulls at his pipe, finished his confession.

"A man may see red and yet foresee the end of things. I knew that probably I should be caught out some day, but I wanted to see the child grow up in some clean corner of the world like this. I wanted to save money for her; I have; it's settled on her — two hundred a year or so. She doesn't know, I'll give you the name of my lawyers. I wanted the child to be happy; I believe she has been happy."

Wilding answered quickly.

"There is not the slightest doubt about that."

"I want her to go on being happy. She's not made to be a lone creature. I believe you could give her happiness, Wildie. Or will this alter things?"

"I'd give her anything in the world."

"Man, that's something off my soul. I believe you two are made for each other. Doesn't often happen that way.

"Well, as I've already said, the game is up. We have been caught out somewhere. I have had the shadow of it over me for a long while. But they are not going to get me, my lad. They may only suspect me. The other people may have held their tongues. Perhaps when I am deep down in the clean sea — the world won't bother. She'll never know."

"But if the truth should come out?"

"Just hold her fast, man, hold her fast."

Farren rose slowly from the sofa. His movements had a languor, as though he had exhausted himself. His shoulders had the stoop of resignation, of a burden long born. It was as though he realized the weight of it now that it was slipping from his shoulders. Wilding, strangely shocked and still half-incredulous, went and stood in the doorway.

"Is it as bad as you think? Why not chance it?"

"What, to be shut up in a cage, knowing that she knows? Fate's been kind: it has given me my warning. No, my lad; I'm going."

His voice sounded tired; he moved towards the door.

"Besides — at fifty — a man is not so greedy for life. A kind of weariness comes over one. Be kind to her."

Their hands met and held.

"You need not doubt it."

"I don't. But go on being kind. It's always a bit of a lottery, but somehow, I feel that you two——"

"Yes; in spite of my poor, damned face."

"Partly because of it. But it's not a poor, damned face to her."

They moved out into the dark little garden, and to Wilding the night seemed more strange than any other night that he had known. To be walking with a man who was on the way to drown himself! And deliberately and with a sense of the inevitable and the balanced rightness of things.

His throat felt thick.

"I can't believe it. And yet——"

Farren paused at the gate.

"Why, I'm rounding things off, that's all. But there is one thing more that you can do."

"Yes."

"Here's an envelope with all the details and addresses and figures inside. And come down to the harbour with me. I have a notion that I am being watched. If there are two of us, and we are talking——"

"I'll come."

"You know the way better than I do. When we get down to the road, I'll take charge. I know a round-about route through the passages and yards."

So Wilding led. The bracken brushed their knees, and the sea showed as a great dim sheet stretched taut from cliff to horizon under the stars. They met no one; they did not speak. Nor did another word pass between them until Farren had unfastened the painter of the dinghy and was ready to step into it.

"Be very kind to her, Tom."

"Don't doubt it."

They gripped, and Farren stepped down into the swaying dinghy and got out a scull and pushed off. The little white boat floated out into the darkness and became no more than a faint blur upon

the waters. And Wilding stood and waited until he heard the starting of the *Sea Horse* engine. Something vague and grey went gliding out towards the sea, a boat and the soul of a man.

XIII

THREE days passed, and St. Gilians knew that Farren the artist, and his boat the *Sea Horse,* had not returned. So did two other men — strangers — who had been hanging about the little Cornish town and the bungalow on the hill.

For three days a girl had wandered along the cliffs, watching and wondering; and during most of that time Wilding was with her.

"But he must come back, Wildie. What can have happened? It has been quite calm."

"They tell me there was roughish weather farther out, dear."

"But he only went for a short cruise. He said that he would be back for breakfast."

Wilding was torn. He wanted her out of her suspense, and yet he felt that the gradual realization of the tragedy might be more merciful than the sudden shock of bad news. How was it going to end? Would the sea send them a message?

The sea sent its message. Wilding happened to be down at the little harbour when the fishing-boat came in with the sea's last word — a white lifebelt with "Sea Horse" painted on it. The fishermen had found it floating.

The owner of the boat spoke to the little crowd on the quay.

"I reckon he got in the track of a steamer, and the boat was cut to bits or driven under. Picked up? Not likely. Besides a good lifebuoy is worth saving, too."

Said a voice: "Who's going to tell the girl?"

They looked at Wilding, and Wilding had forgotten to flinch when men looked at his scarred face.

"That's my job; I'll tell her."

He went slowly up to the white bungalow and found Iris on the cliff. She had seen the boat come in, but not the passing ashore of the sea's message, for the tower of St. Gilian's church hid that strip of the quay.

Wilding stood by her.

"Come and walk. Come up and see Sally and Bob."

"Oh, Wildie——"

"Come! Do you good. I know."

He took one of her arms and gently drew her up and away. They crossed the valley, but when they were climbing the track to the farm, Wilding turned aside with her towards the cliffs. He was taking her to the Maiden Rock, and, suddenly, when they were among those great grey stones, she seemed to realize the meaning of the moment.

"Wildie, why have you brought me here?"

He had an arm round her now.

"Because — my dear — you remember the old tale. They found something to-day out there. It belonged to the *Sea Horse*."

She uttered a sudden, bitter cry, and clung to him.

"Oh, Wildie, Wildie, he'll never come back to me!"

He held her fast.

Heritage

CAPTAIN BLOUNT HAD ONLY ONE LEG, BUT HIS COURAGE PROGRESSED beyond such limitations. With the help of an artificial limb and a stick he made most men of his age appear pusillanimous but then he was no ordinary man, and Rome is no ordinary city.

Hereward Blount loved Rome. He loved it for its February sunshine and its pellucid distances; for its trees and ruins; for its infinite multifariousness and its children. He loved it in spite of its noise and a certain newness which was strident and mechanical. For a century or more the Blounts had one foot in England and the other in Italy. A Blount had lived in Naples during the Hamilton-Nelson romance. Hereward was the son of that Colonel Bartholomew Blount who had landed in Sicily with Garibaldi.

The temper of the man was exceptional. Wakeford the doctor, meeting him toiling up the Spanish Steps, with his head well back and his vital face with its jocund eyes all bronze, was reminded of some strong and pagan creature ascending Olympus.

"Life's rather a glorious show."

Wakeford, who had an indolent liver and a delicate wife, felt the glow of the man, and was sometimes annoyed by it. This boy with the grizzled head and the vigorous torso, straining along gallantly on one sound leg and a stick, was an eternal challenge to a man whose temperament was somewhat bilious.

"How's the stump, Blount?"

"Sound as a rock. A little pain sometimes. Rather good for one, you know."

Good for one, indeed! As a doctor Wakeford knew that people with chronic pains could be plaguing and peevish, and apt to worry the physician when he had sat down to his game of bridge. Wakeford would refer to Blount in the club with a little tinge of scorn.

"Oh, one of those hereditary optimists. Always shining like the

sun in South Africa. Rather boring. One prefers a little cloud at times. Three no trumps, partner."

But Wakeford was a tired man. He could not follow a case of psychology right through, but came up against the obvious and was content with it. Blount was not all yellow metal. He might have a little suite at the "Russie," and be the most popular man in the hotel because of his gaillard countenance and courage, but a man like Blount can be very lonely. The women liked to talk to him, but women in the lounge of a hotel may be no more than a kindly and anonymous noise, and Blount was a person. His courage might be personal, but it was neither beef and beer nor red wine and veal. Nor was he a pagan. He was English, and silently and secretively the man of sentiment. The man who can sit for an hour and watch children playing must have deeps of simplicity, elemental urges beyond the pride of Pan.

Most days Hereward Blount climbed the Pincio or swung along into the Borghese gardens, and found a place in the sun, and sat down to watch life and the children. He loved these Roman children because they played so airily and delicately, and with so little noise, and it seemed to him that they were more fairy-like than the little barbarians of the north. Their voices were softer; they were less solid and less quarrelsome. Hardly ever had he seen among these Roman children the red-faced, blaring egoist of colder countries. These children were sunny; also, they were so unlike the grown-up Romans of the day who trumpeted their bright new tin imperialism like a crowd of Fiat cars.

These children of the gardens seemed to him as old as Psyche and Cupid, and the Winged Messenger, older than Rome, old with the beautiful and sensitive youth of time. They were flower-like, bird-like.

He made friends there. He was so jocund, so full of a radiant vitality that children looked, and hesitated and were caught. They came and stood at his knees and smiled, and from shyness snuggled up beside him to a confiding intimacy. Rarely did any child resist him.

But one day in the Borghese Gardens when he was sitting on a seat under an ilex tree near the piece of water where children and mothers and water-fowl congregate, and a stone arch gives to the

scene the quality of a picture by Claude, he became the witness of a strange scene. A woman was sitting on a seat near him, while a small boy trailed a little wooden boat at the end of a string.

The woman spoke. She spoke in Italian; obviously she was of the south, but of the sensitive, slim south. She was all black and white, with one of those sad and gracious profiles, and dark and quiet eyes. She had the air of one who had suffered much and silently.

"Ronnie — Ronnie."

She called the child by an English name, and the child paid no more heed to her calling than a little fat blow-fly pays to the note of a bell.

Blount was interested. It always interested him to watch the way of a woman with her child, nor had he subscribed to the modern cult of non-interference, of leaving the child free to express itself as it pleases, a creed that may imply slackness on the part of the parents. Blount knew that all civilization is coercion, the cult of self-restraint, and that a child should be taught it, for its own sake as well as for the sake of the community. He watched the woman on the seat. What would she do?

"Ronnie, come here."

The child ignored her. He was a little, solid, handsome child, with a mop of black curls under a round sailor's hat. Even in his smallness he suggested arrogance. His round face was plump and stupid and stubborn. The woman rose from the seat and went and stood over him.

"Ronnie, it is time to go home."

He continued playing with his boat.

"Don't want to go home."

"Come along, dear."

"I'm not going home."

All this was very natural and usual, though Blount got the impression that the woman was afraid of the child. Her touch seemed hesitant. Almost she pleaded.

"Ronnie, we have been here two hours. I have waited here so that you could play. Now we must go home."

"Won't go home."

She stood poised above him. Blount could see her face, and it

seemed to him that sudden anger possessed her, a kind of tragic impatience. She bent down and picked the boat out of the water, and instantly there was a struggle. The child began to scream with rage; his little dark face was distorted. He was very strong; he tore the boat out of her hands and replaced it in the water.

Blount's grizzled eyebrows bristled. He did not laugh as two Italian men seated on chairs laughed. It seemed to him that this particular woman and her problem were not made for laughter. She had been gently reasonable with the child, and the child had defied her. And obviously it hurt her, and more deeply than the casual onlookers knew.

Said Blount to himself: "I should like to smack that small boy and smack him hard"; but he did not think of interfering. The affair was the mother's; it was flesh of her flesh.

She moved away.

"I am going home, Ronnie. I shall leave you."

The boy ignored her; she waited for a moment, and then slowly began to walk towards one of the paths. The boy, squatting at the edge of the water, looked round and saw her retreating. He rose in a rage, and ran trailing the boat after him.

"You shan't go! You shan't go!"

His violence was extraordinary; his little fat face grew livid. He stamped and gesticulated, and all the while he kept up a kind of shrill bellowing. "Shan't go! shan't go; shan't go! Silly old mother. Shan't go! shan't go!" Blount was watching the woman's face. Her anger had passed: she stood there embarrassed and humiliated, and as though incapable of dealing with this violent little animal. It was as though she had been struggling for years against some savage force, and had found herself helpless and defeated.

"Ronnie, people are laughing at you."

The retort came pat, and with a kind of merciless truth.

"No; they are laughing at mother, silly old mother."

Her anger revived, though there may have been more anguish in it than anger. She took him by the wrist, and dragged him along the path, a squeaking, struggling little fury. He fought every step; he twisted and twirled, and hung about her legs. He let himself hang so that his feet trailed along the ground.

The Italians laughed. Blount got up, and then sat down again.

What a beast of a child! Was it the woman's fault, or had some heritage proved too strong for her? But he longed to take that little savage on his knee, and after the use of a hand, to use words of terrible candour. If a child cannot be shamed, it should be hurt. It should be the same with grown children.

Meanwhile the mother's will seemed to wilt under this load of violence. She sat down on another seat further in among the trees. She seemed to be pleading with the child, holding the boat while he still tugged at the string. And then an unforgettable thing happened. The child struck her two sudden blows, one in the face, and the other on the bosom. She sat rigid for a moment; her eyes seemed to close; it was as though those little fists gripped other memories, and opened other wounds. Her pallor was extreme; she seemed to be about to faint.

But Blount had got up. Interference might be clumsy, but he could not restrain himself. He swung along to the seat under the trees. He raised his hat.

He said: "Excuse me, this young fellow is rather a handful. Perhaps you will let me be nurse."

She opened her dark eyes at him; she was surprised, but not offended. Blount was smiling, and she was grateful.

"Ronnie, the gentleman is going to take us home."

The boy glared at Blount.

"Who's he? Don't want to go home."

Blount smiled at him.

"Come along, my lad. I'll carry the boat. Take hands."

He got a grip of the boy's wrist. The little body was tense, stubbornly resisting. The face was sullen.

"Now then, one, two, three — march! I'm Captain Blount. When I say quick march, the soldiers march. Now then."

The child looked at him. There was a clash of wills, a moment of mute yet conscious struggle, but Blount was smiling.

"Step out! You've got to be a soldier. Quick march!"

The boy trailed sullenly at his side.

They walked towards the entrance opposite the Golden Gate in the old red wall of Aurelian: the child sullen, the mother embarrassed and silent. The boy kept glancing up at the man as though appraising an enemy, but the woman looked straight ahead. Blount

talked amiable nonsense; it was necessary to make some sort of cheerful noise, but he kept a firm hand on Ronnie's hand.

"I bet you can't tell me where you live."

"Course I can."

"Well, where?"

"Via Volumna."

Blount smiled at the mother, and met her eyes for a moment.

"I'm a hotel bird. I perch at the 'Russie.' Does anybody like sugar cakes? You come and have tea with me one day, young soldier."

"Don't want your cakes," said the child.

Blount laughed. Mutinous little devil! And so they came to the Via Volumna, a street of high houses let out in flats. The woman paused outside the door of No. 21.

"Thank you so much."

She was Italian, but she spoke very good English; and Blount had begun to wonder how and why, but obviously she was shy of him and under some constraint, and he released the child and raised his hat.

"Good-bye. Good-bye, young pirate. Do you know what a pirate is?"

The boy did.

"A man who shoots people and takes their ships. I'm going to be a pirate and shoot people."

"Nice child," thought Blount.

During the following week the mother and child were often in his mind, though he did not see them again in the gardens; and then, one afternoon, while strolling through the lounge of the "Russie" to his favourite table he saw the mother sitting on one of the sofas. She had come in to tea with one of the residents, and Blount, sighting old Lady Scoles in her own particular corner, walked across and joined her. Lady Scoles knew everybody who was knowable in Rome, and Blount was a pet of hers. He told her naughty stories and she loved them.

"May I sit down?"

"Of course."

"I want to ask you a question."

"Is there a catch in it?"

"I hope not. Can you see the dark woman in black over there

having tea with the Misses Skipwith?"

Lady Scoles looked through her glasses at the mother, and then over the top of them at Hereward Blount.

"Yes, I see her."

"Do you know who she is?"

"Don't you?"

"No; though we met informally a week or so ago."

Lady Scoles looked wise.

"That's Gerald Tarleton's widow. He married an Italian, you know."

"Tarleton!"

"Exactly."

Then Blount understood, though the understanding of the tragedy enlarged itself gradually like a landscape as seen by a man climbing a hill. Tarleton! Everybody in Rome had known Tarleton, and had ended by ceasing from knowing him, just as people in London and Paris and Nice had shed him. A very evil person with a jowl and a flat top to his head and a temper like a sandstorm, a fine figure of a man, but a beast. The violence of his temper had been notorious; it had landed him at times into all sorts of trouble; it had even come near to creating a large scandal in a particular Protectorate where the brute in Tarleton had exercised itself upon the blacks. Later, he had taken to drink; and pneumonia, flaming up in his sodden body, had snuffed him out at the end of six days. For a year or two previous to his death he had been living in Rome.

Blount marvelled. He looked across the lounge at Tarleton's widow, and wondered how such a marriage had been possible, though Tarleton of course had been a handsome, dominant beast. And a man does not show the worst of himself to the girl whom he desires.

Old Lady Scoles observed his glance, and read into it that which was in her own mind.

"Yes, life's rather amazing. A gentle kind of creature."

"Too gentle for the Tarletons of this world," said Blount.

"I believe he behaved like a beast to her."

"He did that to everybody, apparently. One of the better deads, but he might have done it sooner. Will you excuse me?"

Lady Scoles nodded at him benignantly.

"Oh, yes; go and be introduced."

He went gallantly with stick and artificial leg. The Misses Skipwith welcomed him. "Oh, do sit down and have tea with us. This is Mrs. Tarleton. Captain Blount — Mrs. Tarleton." Blount bowed. He did not say that they had met before. He found her dark eyes resting on him for a moment; they could be frightened eyes, as though the male creature had destroyed her confidence in life. But Blount did not sit down; he chatted for a minute, and excused himself. "I'd love to stay, but you will have to excuse me. Letters to write." But his parting glance was at Cesca Tarleton. It was more significant than he knew.

Blount went to his room and had tea sent up there. He wanted to think, to absorb the situation, and when he realized that the little savage animal of the Borghese Gardens was Tarleton's son he began to understand. The child was like the man; he was Tarleton over again. But what a tragedy! What a double tragedy for the woman!

Blount lit his pipe.

"Nature does things strangely," he thought. "If only the kid had taken after the mother. But what a damnable heritage. And for her! She may have counted on the child to make it up to her a little, and life and Tarleton gave her — that."

He sat and reflected. He was wondering whether heritage was final, and whether environment could modify heritage. The scientists were always arguing the point. Could anything be done to humanize that little devil of a Tarleton, a child who could strike his mother in the face because she thwarted his little animal selfishness? Rather a stiff proposition! And a rather ghastly one for the mother.

More than his interest was involved, though a man of Hereward Blount's age does not chase illusions. He had watched life too much and too often, and yet there was much of the eternal boy in him. There were occasions when he did things suddenly, on the surge of an impulse. He had finished his tea and his pipe, and he took his hat and stick and returned to the lounge. Mrs. Tarleton and the two English women were standing near the entrance door. Mrs. Tarleton was going.

Blount's arrival appeared fortuitous and incidental. He had a

ready smile and a quick tongue.

"Seems to me I shall need an artificial head as well as a leg. And a man out of tobacco——"

He spoke to the elder of the Misses Skipwith, but the angle of his glance was on Cesca Tarleton.

"Can't we get it for you? I'm going shopping presently."

"Oh, no; thanks all the same. I hobble along to the shop in the Piazza di Spagna."

The intrusion succeeded. He found himself in the doorway with Mrs. Tarleton. He appropriated the occasion.

"Driving?"

"No; I walk."

"So do I. Good for man's soul. You go this way?"

"Yes."

It was as though she understood the challenge and accepted it. The pavement of this particular Roman street, like that of most Roman streets, is narrow, and Blount moved to take the outer side, the asserting of his old-fashioned creed that a man should stand between woman and the rough-and-tumble world. Certainly in Rome he should stand between her and the taxis. But she, it seemed, understood the limitations of a stick and a mechanical leg.

"Please let me walk on that side."

His eyes gave a kind of gleam.

"Dear lady, on no account. As you see it has been raining, and at least I can take the splashes."

She smiled faintly.

"One has to shout so in Rome, and I have a rather quiet voice."

"Exactly."

He paused, resting on his stick.

"May I be sensible. If we are to walk why should we walk in the street. A taxi up to the Pincio, and a stroll into and by way of the Borghese?"

She looked at him with solemn eyes.

"But your tobacco?"

"I can get it on the way home. Shall it be a taxi?"

"Yes."

Her entering of the motor-cab seemed to him to symbolize her acceptance of the sympathy he wished to offer her. And was it no

more than sympathy? She sat erect in the taxi, serious and dark, like a Roman woman going to some sad ceremony. They threaded the chaotic, noisy restlessness of the streets, and emerged into the sunlight and the spaces between the trees. Her pale face seemed to grow less shadowy.

The taxi drew up on the terrace overlooking Rome, and they got out, and Blount paid the driver. The sun was low over the Janiculum, and they stood by mutual consent on the terrace, and looked out over Rome. The dome of St. Peter's had a tinge of amethyst.

Blount said: "Whenever I stand here I marvel. There is something in this city that makes one believe in immortality. How's my friend the pirate?"

It was as though she had been waiting for that question. It seemed to release in her a spasm of emotion. She turned from the sunset, and they moved together into one of the alleys between the trees.

She said: "Life is so difficult; and one makes so many mistakes."

Blount appeared to lean more heavily on his stick. Obviously her marriage had been her great mistake. She had suffered humiliation as a wife, and now she was suffering humiliation as a mother. She was too sensitive.

He found himself saying the obvious thing: "Oh, most children are little egoists. Some more than others," and the inadequacy of the remark provoked him to a more mordant frankness.

"That boy of yours wants his own way, always and everywhere. You will excuse me. I was watching. It made me angry."

She flushed slightly as though he had accused her.

"You thought me weak."

"No; but, perhaps, too gentle. But one can't get away from one's nature. You haven't tried——?"

He could not put it into words. Nor, somehow, could he visualize her using force upon that little violent body. It would hurt her too much, and she would shrink.

And suddenly she surprised him. She diverged to a seat and sat down. Her face had a white stillness. She looked strung up to the crisis of a confession.

"You are a stranger, and yet — I feel — you understand. You are kind, but you can be stern. Forgive me for speaking like this."

He said gently: "Please go on. You are laying a peculiar honour upon me."

"But does one sit on a seat and talk to someone who——"

"Dear lady, that's life. I have sat down on a seat in a London Park, and a man has come and sat down beside me, and in half an hour half our lives have been exchanged."

"Ah!" she said, "you are different. You understand things. Why?"

"I don't know. My father was an old warrior, and my mother something much better than an angel, a woman. Please talk."

"You never struck your mother."

With a quick movement she pulled up the loose sleeve of her black frock, and showed him a bruise.

"What a confession! What shame! You will think me a weak, dishonourable creature who whimpers and tells tales. But it happens so often. He strikes me. His little rages are — incredible. Almost worse than——"

Her voice seemed to smother, but Blount could have finished the sentence for her. "Almost worse than his father's."

He prodded the gravel with his stick.

"Have you ever struck back? No; I suppose not."

"Once I did. And he fought me. Oh, I'm sorry. I should not be speaking like this. But I don't know what to do. I have tried gentleness, persuasion, reason. I have tried to make him understand. But I can't bear it much longer."

He looked at her, but he saw that she had not finished.

"And such horrible thoughts come. Sometimes I think that it would be better — if he — I — ceased to live. Nothing but pain — violence and pain. And I can see him growing up, and leaving pain everywhere behind him, as his father did. Can you understand? Sometimes — I almost feel — that it is my duty — to stop this heritage."

He was shocked, not by her but with her. He said: "I understand. I have known other creatures that could not be allowed. No; we won't put it that way. I had a dog once whose delight was the killing of other and smaller dogs. I thought — no — the easy way would be weak. I tamed that dog, made a gentleman of him."

Her glance was appealing.

"How?"

"Oh, persuasion of sorts. But it is getting cold. I must not let you sit here."

He stood up, and in rising she seemed to surrender herself into his care.

Those people who flattered themselves that they knew the real Blount pretended to be piqued and amused when it became known later that "Old Grizzle Head" was engaged to marry Tarleton's widow. But no man is a charted sea even to his friends, and the usual and obvious things that are said had the fatuity of most facile opinions. "Old Blount caught at last." "There must be fifteen years between them." "Oh, she's shy and gentle, but quite charming." "Ever seen the kid? Blount's got a handful there. Horrid little beast; a second Gerald." "Oh, probably she has kept the kid in the background."

But no one in Rome had any knowledge of the strangeness of the betrothal, or of Blount's quixotic offer and her acceptance of it. The inwardness of the affair was deep water. Cesca's second lover had a grizzled head, and the wisdom and tenderness of his years.

"Listen. You are going to let me have the child for a month. If I can do anything to tame him — then, *cara mia*, I'll ask you to marry me. We have got to face that heritage. There must be something of you in the boy."

She consented. She asked him no questions, and exacted no promises. As a mother she had exhausted her possibilities. Possibly she had not been sufficiently impartial, and she trusted Blount.

Blount did the thing thoroughly. He borrowed a friend's villa at Frascati for a month, engaged an English hospital nurse and told her just as much as it was necessary for her to know. Ronald was collected one morning and whisked off in a car to Frascati. His acceptance of the adventure was easy, because the little rogue-child believed that he was going for a morning's drive with the man who made soldiers march. He did not realize that he was about to spend a month with an old soldier.

The first clash came when Master Ronnie realized what had happened to him. To begin with, the villa at Frascati had seemed to him a wonderful place; it had even contained boxes of lead soldiers, and between lunch and tea Hereward Blount and the child

played at soldiers in the sunny loggia. Blount showed Ronnie Tarleton how infantry stood on parade and cavalry were drawn up in squadrons.

About six o'clock the nurse collected the child. He supposed that he was going home, but when he discovered that he was to be bathed and put to bed by a strange woman in a strange house, he flew into one of his rage storms.

"I want to go home to mother. Let me alone, you old beast."

The nurse had had her instructions. She was a strong and deliberate person, and she picked up the boy and carried him struggling to the loggia where Blount sat watching the sunset. Ronald Tarleton was set down before Old Grizzle Head, a kind of grave soldier-god in a chair.

"What's all this? Stand up, young man, like a soldier. You can leave us, nurse."

The boy looked sullenly at Blount.

"I want to go home to mother."

"So—you do! But you are not going home to your mother, Ronnie, until you have learnt how to behave to your mother."

Blount's eyes were smiling and kind but inexorable.

"Soldiers don't scream and strike women. A soldier has to be a gentleman. I am going to teach you, my dear."

And suddenly the boy flew at him, but Blount had expected such an attack. He just caught him, imprisoned him, and holding the little hands, held the boy on his knees, with his head upon his chest. He did not strike him. He just held him inexorably, helpless and controlled, until the little legs had ceased to drum, and the struggling body relaxed.

"No escape, my dear. I am going to teach you to behave like a soldier. You are going to learn to obey. You are not going to have your own way. You are going to learn to be a little gentleman instead of a little beast."

The boy whimpered.

"I want my mother."

"You are not going back to your mother until you have learnt what I have to teach you."

There was a sudden storm of angry tears.

"I'm not a little beast."

"No one wants you to be a little beast, my dear. Now, are you going to let nurse bathe you?"

"Yes."

"You will tell her you are sorry for not behaving like a soldier."

"I won't."

"Very well, you will stay here until you do."

To Hereward Blount that singular month in Frascati was proved to be one of the most humanly interesting experiences he had known, more fascinating than shooting tigers or fighting wild tribesmen. He set out to tame a little tiger. He never lost his temper. Always he was kind, patient, but inexorable. He was always ready to play with the child, and the soldiers were paraded on the stone floor of the loggia.

"Now then, lights out, old man. Last post."

"But, Nuncy Blount, I want just to——"

"Bugle's gone. Orders, my dear."

There were clashes, but each day showed a perceptible change in the child. He had found a master; his little violent egotism was countered and controlled. Also, he was not all Tarleton. Something else showed in him: an affection which, when purged of its savage passion, began to express itself. Besides, Blount had always been irresistible to children; he could be the child with them when the day was a child's play-box. He handled young Tarleton with delicate strength, and the boy, having once discovered the inevitableness of certain things, seemed to shed his savagery and to change. He began to show a gradual devotion to Blount. More and more he wanted to be with Old Grizzle Head.

"Nuncy, were you at Waterloo?"

"No, my dear. I'm not quite so old as that, but my grandfather was there. He was wounded."

"Nuncy, was your leg——?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Did it hurt much?"

"Not so much, my dear, as when a boy is unkind to his mother."

One morning the child looked at him solemnly.

"Nuncy, am I a soldier yet?"

"Well, nearly. You're twice the man you were when you came here. I'm getting quite proud of you. Now, let's see you salute."

The child drew himself up, put his heels together, and saluted.

"Splendid. And when a soldier salutes he says to himself: 'For King and Country and Mother.' A soldier should never tell a lie, or be cruel. He should be gentle to women and children and all animals, because he is strong and brave."

"Nuncy, when can I see mother? I want to show her how I can salute."

"I think very soon, my soldier."

So Hereward Blount wrote that letter.

"My dear, come. Ronnie wishes to salute you."

He kept her coming as a surprise for the boy, but when he saw Cesca Tarleton on the steps of the villa, and the child standing stiffly to attention with his hand to his forehead, something cried out in him.

"Ronnie, splendid! The soldier may kiss his mother."

The child rushed into the outstretched arms.

Discord

"Moral courage!" said Old Mischief, poking the granite chips with the point of his stick, and looking sly, "What about moral courage? Beastly phrase."

The man who had provoked the argument was lighting a pipe, leaning forward in one of the blue garden chairs, with his hat tilted over his eyes, for the morning was sunny, and beyond the balustrade the sea sent up a flickering glare.

"Doing something you don't want to do," he said.

"But — why call it moral?"

"Well, there's a difference, isn't there?"

"How?"

"Physical courage, like facing a lion, or facing a yelling crowd."

"You call that moral?"

"One does; one draws distinctions."

Old Mischief sat and smiled.

"I'd like to turn your hypothetical lion on to your yelling crowd. Courage, yes; there are all sorts of courage. Personally I have a prejudice in favour of the monkey courage that sits and gibbers and shivers, and then comes down off its bough — in spite of its shiverings. And not for a coco-nut ——"

"That's my point," said the earnest young man with his high colour under the turned down brim of his hat.

"Something you don't do for the sake of a coco-nut."

"Exactly."

The orchestra in the kiosk under the palms showed signs of life; the violinist, a little, dark-eyed man with a fuzz of black hair and the face of a marmoset, was standing and cuddling his beloved instrument under his chin. His eyes met the eyes of Old Mischief, and smiled. The little figure bent slightly at the hips, and Old Mischief's truculent white head answered with a benedictory nod. There had been some talking, a scraping of feet and chairs on the

shingled terrace, but when the little violinist began to play the "Chant Hindu," a silence fell, and that silence was maintained.

At the end of the piece Old Mischief led the applause, and it seemed to the earnest young fellow that he was applauding the man as well as the music. The violinist's polite little bow was directed to the old man's chair, and the young man asked a question.

"You know that violinist chap?"

"I do."

"He can play."

"Other things, too. Talking of moral courage! I have never seen anything that got me so hot in the soul——"

"Oh — how? Something he did?"

"Last season — here."

"I'd like to hear about it. He makes me think of your monkey on a bough."

"So he is — but a super-monkey. I'll tell you about it, if you like."

"Do."

And so, in the pauses between the music, Old Mischief told the earnest young man whose name was Spargood — the tale of the monkey and the Blatant Beast. He told it with fierce emotion, and a little twirling smile, and glimmers of irony and of pathos.

He began by pointing to the stony dressing of the terrace.

"See that stuff?"

"The shingle, or whatever they call it here?"

"Yes. Not exactly a musical surface — is it?"

"Hardly."

"And the chairs. Drag a chair — with its heels trailing — and you make a nasty sort of noise."

"I've heard it."

"Not during the music."

"No."

The orchestra played "Tales of Hoffmann," and Old Mischief sat in silence until the applause had died away.

"Warm-blooded people — some Italians. Make good husbands and fathers. Sarto has a wife and three kids; immensely attached to them, almost more than to his violin."

"But that kind of attachment is rather different."

"Oh — in a way. Haven't you heard of men dying for their crafts,

a bit of chemistry or a bit of medicine?"

Spargood thought that he had; he was wondering when Old Mischief would get on with his tale — but Old Mischief had his own way of telling a tale. He appreciated atmosphere, the live details of a drama.

"They live in a flat, top floor in one of those big blocks behind the church. Maria dries her washing on the flat roof, and the three kids play there, jolly, brown little beggars; and Sarto grows a few mangy plants in boxes. He is not much good at plants — is Sarto."

"Better at throwing coco-nuts," said Spargood a little restively.

Old Mischief paused for another selection, thinking the while that one of the most important lessons a young man has to learn is not to be in too much of a hurry.

"Sarto threw his coco-nut all right. I may say at the time that Maria had been ill — and he was over-worked and over-worried, trying to wash the children and nurse his wife and pay the doctor, and play his violin. Of course — his violin was his tonic, his safety valve; a man's job is."

"He played here?"

"Yes, just the same, in his little suede-topped boots, and a red handkerchief sticking out of his pocket. Played like blazes, and the more serious Maria's illness grew — the better he played. Perhaps you would not have expected that?"

"Oh — I don't know," said Spargood, relighting his pipe; "I remember, during the war ——"

But Old Mischief would not allow him to be reminiscent.

"Same orchestra, same people, same chairs, same silly stones, same kids trundling their hoops. Sarto didn't like the hoops, but he made allowances for children. One has to. As for the people — they are always much the same, rather stupid and self-absorbed and over-fed — most of 'em. You have to burn brown paper under their noses before they sit up and take notice."

He sat and smiled for a moment.

"To them — Sarto was just a little, fuzzy-headed Dago who could make rather nice noises on a violin. To some; not all. But it is always the somes who make trouble. She — was one of them."

"Ah — she was," said Spargood, realizing that the other important person was being pushed on to the stage.

Old Mischief allowed himself a brief reverie, an enjoyable moment of gazing at one of the most piquant pictures in the gallery of his recollections. In repose his long, sun-tanned old face wore an expression of sardonic benignity, his grey eyes looking out under his white eyebrows with a steady glitter at the sea.

"Yes — she was immense," he said; "one of those masses of overfed egotism trailing about with a wheezy Pekinese on the end of a leash. Her husband — I believe — had founded some big business, fifty or sixty retail shops scattered about along the south coast. Anyway, he had been knighted. Sir Augustus Pork. He was dead — but Lady Pork ——!"

He gave an almost soundless and wicked chuckle.

"Imagine a surface of raw ham dusted over with baking-powder. Add custard-coloured hair, a pair of American spectacles, a double chin, a vastness dressed in white, and ankles that made you think of sandbags. No; I'm not being cruel. Good nature can redeem most things, like a spice of parmesan in spaghetti. She was a beast."

"I know the sort," said Spargood; "incredibly stupid and incredibly arrogant."

"Buried in mental fat. Well — she had the No. 1 — super-suite in the hotel, and her blessed dog was the only one allowed to enter the sacred portals. The 'Grand' was not doing too well last season; the manager was jumpy and worried, and of course — a prize pig like Lady Pork wallowing in the best pen ——! An animal to be worshipped, a sacred symbol — almost. Yes, she really did wallow. She used to come down in crimson and blue dresses, like a Max Beerbohm cartoon, her red mottlings plastered over. And what that woman could eat! I sat at the next table. She dug up her victuals like a dredger. The staff buzzed about her like flies; she threw money about, oozed with it. Not generosity — you know — but mere ostentation."

He drew an exultant breath.

"Now, for the monkey! Can you imagine an enraged and chattering little ape hurling a coco-nut at such a magnificent and potent creature?"

"In a way — oh — rather. But how ——?"

"I'm coming to that. See — the kiosk, and the stones, and the chairs, and the little Sarto in an ecstasy of worried emotion and

music, and people — some of them — talking all through the music, and a lot of French on the parade chattering like a flock of dingy jackdaws?"

"I can see it."

"And the sea a purring blue, and the flowers smiling, and the mimosa making a golden smell, and Sarto playing the Kashmiri Love Lyrics. 'Pale hands I loved ——' Eleven A.M.; just about then — always — the Pork arrives."

"In a butcher's cart!"

"Trailing that Pekinese who had a way of yapping at everybody and everything. But it wasn't the dog — but the woman. She liked to make a noise. Lady Pork — forward. She must have a particular chair in a particular place, and there was a chair kept labelled — 'Lady Pork.'"

"That's fame!"

"Rather. Now, mark you, she could have had both chasseurs from the hotel carrying chairs all over the place for her, but that was not my lady's way. She was the sort of woman who likes making a noise, simply can't help it, must bang doors, and clatter things. Form of stupidity, insensitiveness — same thing. People who bang doors ought to be bow-stringed. As I say — the Pork woman loved noise, or seemed to, personal noise, her noise. It came out even in the matter of that chair. It never appeared to be standing just where she wanted it to stand, and she would take it by the nape of the neck and drag it with its heels trailing ——"

"Over the stones?"

"Over those damned stones, and right through the *sentimentado* of Sarto's soft movements. It always seemed to happen like that; yes, every morning, just as though she had timed it to a nicety. It used to make me grit my teeth."

He stretched out his long, thin legs, and crossed one over the other, and his movements were rather like the movements of a bird.

"Of course, it got poor Sarto. The first time it happened I saw him wince. He looked as though he were going to burst into tears. Ever seen a monkey weep? The second day he looked surprised, puzzled, as though he simply could not understand anybody trailing that damned noise right through his music. It wasn't so much the obtuse discourtesy of the thing as the insult — to music — all music.

On the third day when he saw her coming, and the orchestra was in the middle of a piece of Schumann's — he did what was for Sarto a quite dramatic thing ——"

Old Mischief paused; he liked the artistry of pauses; he appeared to be interested in something out to sea. Spargood waited — but he might have waited forever had he not slipped into the slot of Old Mischief's mind the necessary penny of curiosity.

"What did Sarto do?"

"Stopped the music."

"Did he though!"

"And stood there waiting; with his bow trembling like a fencing foil, until my lady had finished with the chair and had sat down."

"Did she notice anything?"

"Would she?"

"I suppose not."

"No more than a raw ham would have missed the buzzing of a fly. Sarto tried it twice."

"Without effect?"

"Quite."

"Poor little devil."

"Not so poor a little devil. He had his orchestra with him, and I suppose they put their heads together, for next day they timed themselves to be in the middle of some raging, banging jazz tune. They were making a devil of a noise, and when my lady came and dragged her chair through the middle of it, with the Pekinese snuffling with his nose in the air, and Sarto stopped the music ——"

"You could have heard a pin fall."

"You could hear the dog snuffling. But did she notice the silence? Not she. I saw little Sarto go as white as his shirt front. His teeth showed. Remember that he had a sick wife and debts ——"

"Yes — but didn't anybody ——?"

"We just sat. I admit I was on the edge of my chair, ready to jump into the breach — but on the next occasion the whole business was on fire before one could think of water."

"Sarto lost his — hair?"

"Oh, it was more stately than that. The little fellow really behaved like a gentleman — but he said things, he must have said pretty nasty things with a smile and a bow."

"Went for her?"

"Yes. She trailed her chair right through the 'L'Apres Midi.' He stopped the music; walked across to her. I was rather too late."

"You didn't hear ——?"

"Only the tail of it, if one can hear a tail wagging. I think he just told my lady in broken English exactly what she was. Raw ham! My lord!"

"Some row?"

"She got up like a mottled fishwife. She walked straight up to the hotel. As a matter of fact we had applauded; I led it off. And the woman's face! She went straight for Mathers, the manager."

Old Mischief surveyed his neighbours, and then dropped his voice a little.

"Well, you know Mathers. Nice chap, but a smiler and a cynic; sort of fellow who shrugs his shoulders and tries to slip round an obstacle instead of getting over it. Lady Pork went for Mathers hammer and tongs. She said she had been grossly insulted by a little hired monkey who played the fiddle. Sarto must be sacked, yes, instanter, or my lady would have her trunks packed. I suppose Mathers did a little calculation. Violinists are cheap, and Lady Pork was occupying the most expensive suite and spending more money than anyone else in the hotel.

"Mathers suggested an apology — but she would not hear of an apology; she was not apologized to by foreign fiddlers. She threatened to write to Mathers' Company and to tell the directors that she had been insulted, and that their manager had refused to give her proper satisfaction.

"That — got Mathers. He saw that she meant to be nasty, and he happened to know that the directors were not satisfied, and that he was none too sure of his job, so he became very polite and sympathetic and promised to sack Sarto that very day. It would be cheaper to pay the fellow a month's salary and clear him out than to offend Lady Pork."

"So Mathers sacked him?"

"Yes."

"Rather awkward for Mathers."

"Life is very awkward for people without independence, but I must say those musicians came out of it rather well. The whole

orchestra struck when Sarto told them that he had been fired."

"Did they though!"

"And that was how we discovered what had happened, for the 'Grand' had no orchestra that night, and the people who wanted to dance began to grouse."

"Well — naturally. Just because an arrogant and vulgar old woman ——"

"I went and saw Mathers, and Mathers shrugged his shoulders, and said that he had to think of his directors and the hotel."

"Didn't mention himself?"

"No. Why should he? And then I sent to see Sarto. I found him sitting in a chair beside his wife's bed, feeding her with bread and milk, his eyes as big as saucers. He made a sign to me to say nothing. He hadn't told her, didn't mean to tell her — while she was like that. Rather plucky of him. He was pretending that he had an evening off, and he was going to go on pretending — until he got another job."

Old Mischief allowed himself another pause, and Spargood lit another pipe.

"We went up on to the roof, and there — little Sarto — let himself explode. He talked at me and at the stars — and I tell you — I felt rather small. Why hadn't we — the people who sat and listened to music and applauded it — helped him to quell the Blatant Beast? Had we sick wives and doctors' bills, and children to be fed? And he had nothing but a violin. Well — I took the little man by the arm. I told him that I would see what could be done, and I can tell you that I meant something to be done. The little chap had me hot about the ears."

"It — was — rather fine of him."

"He had thrown his coconut. It was up to us, the comfortable and secure people, to throw ours. I went back to the hotel, and into the smoking-room and the billiard room, and got hold of several sober fellows and told them to collect their wives. Then, we had a little gathering in the bridge room, with the door locked, and I put Sarto's case and how I felt about it."

"Did they rise?"

"In bits. Very awkward — you know — for comfortable people to jeopardize all their holiday arrangements, but I talked them over.

I made them see that if the whole hotel acted pretty solidly we could outweigh the pork merchant. Old Sandeman, a very decent old fellow who occupied No. 2 suite, helped me a lot by coming out strongly on Sarto's side. We formed a small committee."

"I see. And canvassed——?"

"Yes, every blessed resident, and by twelve o'clock next day we had persuaded three-quarters of the people that it was our duty to get Sarto back. We actually persuaded them to sign their names."

"Splendid," said Spargood earnestly; "splendid."

Old Mischief appeared to be enjoying the sweet savour of a pleasant memory, staring at the toes of his shoes as though he loved them.

"Of course the committee went and interviewed Mathers and put the proposition to him."

"Rather awkward again for Mathers."

"Oh—I don't know. We showed him where he was. Sarto was to be re-engaged, or about a hundred and twenty people had decided to pack their boxes and depart on the morrow. There happened to be plenty of room at the 'Mont Fleur,' and the 'Britannique,' and Mathers knew it. He tried to look pathetic."

"You are putting very embarrassing pressure upon me, gentlemen. It seems that I have got to offend somebody——"

"Obviously," said I; "but we are not going to fry poor little Sarto in Lady Pork's angry fat. Leave it with her."

He explained that my lady meant to be nasty, and had threatened to write to the board of directors.

"Let her," said old Sandeman, "I happen to know Porter-Brown who is on the board. I'll take care that she does not get at them behind your back."

That settled Mathers. We told him that he had better go himself and see Sarto, and at first he refused and talked about his dignity, until old Sandeman began to fidget with his eye-glass.

"My dear sir, what about Sarto's dignity? Isn't a musician——?"

And Mathers went.

I saw him when he came back, and the man actually had a soft look in his cynical, suave eyes.

"That little chap's a gentleman, Mr. Carfax."

"So I thought," said I.

"I apologized, had to. Didn't quite realize his position, you know. He is coming back to-night."

I can tell you we were all sitting on our heels that evening to see what happened to my lady's face when she saw that Sarto had revived. Yes, it was rather stimulating. She turned the colour of *vin ordinaire* when the orchestra struck up and she saw Sarto cuddling his violin. She called up the *maître d'hôtel*, and sent him for Mathers.

Mathers arrived. We watched. I think Mathers rather enjoyed it after the way she had trampled on him.

She got up, and walked out of the room just as the orchestra finished a selection.

My dear chap, you should have heard the applause! We might have been a lot of children. It was rather ridiculous and rather touching. We clapped, we drummed on the tables, we shouted encore. Even the waiters joined in. I had a last glimpse of the red back of my lady's neck.

Then someone got up, an old lady, and presented Sarto with a bouquet.

And Sarto — Sarto burst into tears, and had his head held on the pianist's shoulder!

A comedy! Oh, yes, a little comedy, with a lot of the real human stuff at the back of it. Lady Pork finished her dinner *en suite*, and went off next day, leaving a frizzle of furious fat behind her.

"But there's the little man, Sarto, on his perch."

Mr. Spargood stared at the sea.

"His wife got well, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; they have another baby. These Italians are irresponsible. And I'm ——"

He chuckled.

"I'm it's godfather."

Restitution

THE MAN AND HIS TRUNK LOOKED EQUALLY SOLITARY ON THE asphalt of the La Marondou platform. The sun had touched the hills, and the sudden chill of the sunset was emphasized by the quivering pines and the falling blue of the sea.

An unshaven and broad-backed porter got hold of the man's trunk.

"Hôtel Minerva, monsieur?"

"No, Hôtel Hesperides."

"*Bien*, monsieur."

There were but two hotels at La Marondou, the Minerva and the Hesperides, both insignificant and obscure, and patronized by people whose insignificance equalled their obscurity. The stout porter, having little to do, and being like all Latins a lover of a lottery, would bet with himself as to the destination of the visitors to La Marondou. "*Voilà*, a Minervan!" or "That goes to the Hesperides," and having guessed wrongly in this particular case he looked hard at the stranger.

The man had turned up the collar of his overcoat. He had narrow and high shoulders, and a grey and narrow face, a face of infinite melancholy. He looked cold.

"A sick man," thought the porter; "come in search of the sun. Poor devil! These English look as though they were made of two boards nailed together."

A shabby concierge with "Hesperides" in frayed gold upon his cap was waiting at the door of the booking-office.

"Hôtel Hesperides," shouted the porter.

The concierge took off his cap to the stranger.

"Meester Massing-ham."

The stranger nodded.

"How far?"

"But a leetle way, monsieur."

The trunk was placed on a barrow in charge of an old pirate in striped shirt and blue breeches, and Mr. Massingham and the concierge walked down the dusty road that ended in four sad-looking palm trees and the sea. La Marondou reposed on the half-moon of a bay, with a few fishing-boats drawn upon the sand, and an old grey tower straddling a rock in the centre. The Hôtel Minerva stood on one horn of the bay, the Hôtel Hesperides on the other. Between them a loop of shabby yellow-and-white villas and fly-blown shops confronted the austere cleanliness of the sea.

Mr. Massingham entered the Hôtel Hesperides, to stare with a kind of tired voicelessness at the voluble face of madame. Yes, he would like to go straight to his room. Tea? Yes, he would be glad of some tea.

"Marie, *numero dix*."

Mr. Massingham ascended the narrow stairs, and was shown into No. 10. He stood quite still in the middle of the room until the door was closed upon him, and he continued to stand there for the best part of a minute, like a prisoner who has been pushed into a cell, and feels the chill of it and a shivering that is the shivering of his own soul.

Massingham walked to the window and leaning against the iron rail looked down at the sea, and the sweep of sand turning to orange in the sunset, but in spite of the colour in the sky a chilly sadness was falling like dew upon this little third-rate pleasure resort. It looked shabby. It made the man's impressions of it and of himself seem shabbier than they had any right to be.

He sighed.

"I wonder if there are any English here?"

He had come to La Marondou to avoid his own country-people, also to be alone, terribly yet deliciously alone in a world of emptiness and silence, and to escape from all that confusion of thought and those inconstant impulses that had made for bewilderment.

"I wonder if I shall sleep here?"

For to Mr. Massingham sleep was the only heaven.

At half-past seven the patrons of the Hôtel Hesperides gathered in the *salle à manger*, some twenty persons scattered at the little tables under the white glare of the unshaded lights. The room had a bluish tinge which extended to the tablecloths and the napkins, and the

shirt fronts and faces of the two sickly looking waiters. Half the room was French, and the rest of it a smattering of English, Belgian and Dutch. In one corner sat a little, brown-haired woman with tired, blue eyes and a mouth that flickered between a smile and a sneer. At the table in front of her, a very square old man with the face of a dyspeptic parrot, and a shirt and collar that bulged under a leatherly double chin, pulled his bread to pieces and read some interminable novel. He read it as though it angered him, and caused him to emit scowlings of angry protest. "What rot!" Further on his right, a chinless and vague lady drooped pale and protruding eyes over her soup, looking as though she had committed some fatal social solecism and would never outlive the shame of it.

Mr. Massingham walked into the room. He moved like a figure of wood, feeling that everyone was looking at him, which was true, for in such a place as the Hôtel Hesperides the appearance even of a starved cat was an interesting event. André, the smaller of the two waiters, indicated a table next to the one occupied by the brown-haired woman with the tired eyes. Massingham sat down, spread his table napkin, and fixed his eyes on the square back of the morose and indignant reader of novels. He noticed that a fly was going through its ablutions on the crown of the square grey head.

Someone spoke to him in English, and he turned a slow eye and head as though compelling himself to look at a ghost.

"I beg your pardon?"

The woman with the brown hair had asked him for the salt.

"Would you mind ——? They are so short of things here."

Massingham passed it to her.

"Thank you so much."

She had a pleasant voice, more like her smile than her sneer, but the man was frightened by an English voice, and he submerged himself in his soup. The woman at the next table, her name was Farren, examined his irresponsive profile, and finding that Massingham showed no sign of wishing to follow up the opportunity she had given him, she left him alone. But between the courses the man with the novel threw disjointed remarks at her over a square shoulder.

"How's Elsie? What? Splendid. That's right. Vile trash this chap writes."

"Well — I warned you, Mr. Crossby. It sold fifty thousand ——"

"Ha — did it! I should think so. What, veal again!"

Between the veal and the caramel cream he turned slap round in his chair and gave Massingham a bushy stare. In fact he nearly said "Ha!" to him; seeing that the new arrival avoided a direct glance, he twitched his eyebrows and seemed amused.

"Play Bridge, sir?"

"No," said Massingham curtly — "I don't."

Mr. Crossby reverted to his novel.

"Our turn to go to Minerva," he flung over his shoulder when the waiter placed a basket of oranges before him. "Feel up for it?"

"I shall have to look at Elsie ——"

"Oh, quite, quite. Elsie has first call. She'll turn up trumps. Dash it — nothing but oranges again. Why no bananas?"

"Because of that wretched song, I suppose."

Mr. Crossby closed his novel with a bang, got up, gave Massingham a fierce and half-contemptuous look, and turned towards the door.

"Well — I'll wait in the lounge. If Elsie is all right ——"

"Let's say in half an hour," said Elsie's mother.

Massingham went out and wandered on the sands, walking so close to the sea that an occasional gliding wavelet welled about his feet. The night was very calm, and cold, but not as cold as the sea, or as the thoughts of him who wandered up and down and wondered why he had come here, why he was not dead, why people lived at all. And who was Elsie? Some poor, sickly thing hanging on to life like a frosted flower in the Spring. And bother these English! It seemed impossible to lose them; they would pop up in a corner of Patagonia and ask you to play "Bridge."

Yet, he slept well that night, and woke to the sun streaking in through the slits of the jalousies, and he heard the sea purring. He lay and listened to it, lying prone with the sudden anguish of a return to consciousness and of the rediscovery of his self. Oh, self-weariness, the weariness of shame and of failure! Why did one wake?

Someone knocked.

He had left his door unlocked, and he called "*Entrez*," to behold the little waiter and a tray of coffee and rolls.

"*Il fait beau temps, monsieur.*"

Somewhere above him Massingham heard a child's laughter, and the creaking of a shutter.

"Oh — mummy — I can paddle to-day. Look."

"Yes, poppet, I think you can."

During the next two days Massingham spoke to nobody and nobody attempted to speak to him, for he looked like England in March, grey and shabby and morose, a solitary, drifting about the sands, and coming in to his meals with the air of seeing nothing but the table towards which he walked. On the second day a child took her place at Mrs. Farren's table, and stared at Massingham with big, brown, serious eyes, eyes to be avoided by a man who asked to be allowed to forget the illusions of his own very distant youth. Yet Elsie continued to stare. She was not to be obliterated by the man's wilful blindness. His apparent indifference to everything around him puzzled and interested the child.

"He looks like a man in a photo, Mummy."

"What do you mean, poppet?"

"As though someone had put him in a shop window and he didn't want to be there."

Clairvoyant childishness! It caused Massingham to remark to himself that he wished that the child would not sit and stare so unsmilingly. Not that he wanted her to smile; no; that might provoke another process of self-torture, and his bewilderment was still seeking a solution, an end, sleep, the escape from self. A child can be so poignant. Its eyes contain the "Might have been," a selfishness that is still healthy and unslimed. He set out to avoid Mrs. Farren and Mrs. Farren's small daughter, as he avoided all the loiterers who took sun-baths on the La Marondou sands, going carefully out of the front door of the hotel, and eschewing the dusty little garden with its round blue tables and austere chairs.

But, like Balaam, he was to meet his angel. It happened on the sandhills where he was lying against a bank, with his eyes half-closed and seeing nothing but the blue marriage of sea and sky, when a child's head came over a low dune in front of him. It approached. Two feet in white canvas shoes slithered down the loose bank, depositing in the trough below him a creature in a pink jumper. He was challenged by an upward stare.

She smiled.

Had Massingham had the heart of a murderer he could not have killed that smile. His face cracked in an uneasy response. He sat up, his hands on his knees, knowing that his silence was mere cat's-ice that would not bear the weight of a child's challenge.

"Been paddling?" he asked.

"Yes — it was lovely. Don't you paddle?"

He managed to laugh, and she squatted down on the yellow sand, and continued to regard him as though he was for that morning the centre of the universe.

"Why don't you paddle?"

"I'm too old."

"You don't look too old."

"Perhaps I'm not strong enough."

"But Dr. Charcot lets me paddle, and I've been ill — terrible ill — months and months. Daddy sent Mummy and me out here because I was so ill."

"I expect your Daddy is very glad that you are better."

"Of course he is. I get weighed at the chemist's every Monday."

Mrs. Farren found them there together. She had come along the sands calling "Elsie — Elsie," and the child had scrambled up one of the low dunes and waved to her. Massingham, rising, and lifting his hat, looked unsmilingly at the mother as though he would have her to understand that the acquaintanceship had not been of his seeking, and that she could not accuse him of playing for the friendship of a child. His stiff pose suggested that he had no friends, and did not expect to have them.

Mrs. Farren looked at him appraisingly. She thought that the child's description of him fitted exactly — the man in the shop window who did not want to be stared at.

"I hope Elsie hasn't been boring you."

He protested that such a thing was impossible. It was Elsie who had conferred the favour.

"Children do — you know."

"Oh — not always."

She disagreed, realizing how miserable his eyes were, and that there was a clouded and mortally wounded kindness behind their misery. Something had gone very wrong with his life — but so far

as Mrs. Farren's experience had a right to point a finger it indicated an almost universal disharmony, purblind confusion. Life was such a muddle.

She buried a hand in her child's hair.

"Thank heaven — I have only one such problem."

Her smile and her sneer seemed present together, but the smile outlasted the sneer.

"Why am I a problem, Mummy?"

"Partly — because you are the only one, my dear. Now, come along; we shall be late for lunch."

Elsie glanced at Massingham.

"Won't he be late — too?"

So the three walked back together to the white front and the blue railings of the Hôtel Hesperides, and Elsie had broken the ice of the man's silence. It could not be mended, and perhaps he did not want to mend it. After all, what harm could he and his exit do to a child?

He was like old Winter warming his hands in the heart of the first Spring day, suffering because of it, for his cold hands ached with the young warmth, and yet he could not deny himself the delicate pain of a child's friendship. He let himself slide into the inevitableness of it. He actually hung about on the sands, waiting for that little figure to appear. His heart hurried a little. They played games together. Massingham would set up his stick in the sand, put an old tin on the top of it and run a cockshy show, with a ten centime piece for each striking of the tin. But Elsie was not a mercenary child; she exercised on his behalf a serious and confidential restraint.

"That's five. I must not have any more this morning."

"Why not?"

"You'll be ruinated."

He was that already, though she did not know it, and those ten centime pieces were the last grains in his life's hour-glass. He had enough money to pay Madame of the Hesperides for a three weeks' sojourn.

And then?

He would find himself looking at the child, and wondering, not deeming her capable of reacting to his wonder, but when she did react he was astonished.

"What makes you look so funny?"

"Funny! What's that?"

"Don't know. Like Daddy used to look when I was so ill."

"But you are not ill now."

"No — Elsie's well. You needn't look funny."

"I won't," he said.

Friendship with the child adumbrated a certain degree of friendliness with the mother, but Massingham was shy of Mrs. Farren for she was a grown-up, sophisticated, and he was conscious of that elusive sneer. Her smile never seemed to him to be complete, and yet, as the days went by he became less conscious of her sneer. He did not seem to be included in it; in fact he began to believe that he was part of the world upon which she smiled. With Elsie busy collecting plunder on the shore for the decorating of some sand-castle they would sit and talk, their eyes narrowed to the blue glare of the sea. It was the disjointed conversation of two people whose words were like intimate footsteps strolling idly on the seashore.

Massingham noticed that Mrs. Farren's eyes hardly ever left the child, and in one moment of frankness she let him see the inwardness of her devotion.

"Oh — one must hold on to something."

"Of course."

"There is so little that matters — really."

He sat considering the shreds of his own creed.

"We men," he began.

"Oh, men are good ——"

He gave her a glance of surprise.

"You're kind — mostly, such boys. And then — of course — you are such failures — the best of you — in the vulgar sense, I mean."

"You think so?"

"Well — aren't you? And yet ——"

She brooded a moment.

"I'm married to one of the failures, a most lovable failure. Too scrupulous — you know. He can't do the little dirty things that make for success. Even now ——"

Her eyes were tender.

"A managing clerk in a solicitor's office. We let our little house to give the child a chance. He is living in two rooms, scraping,

saving every halfpenny for this. But so much of the world makes me sneer."

From that moment Mr. Massingham understood her sneer; it was part of her armour, her retort to the successful greeds of progress. It humiliated him; it was like a hot wire touching the secret shame that was in him.

"Restitution," he said, "sometimes one gets a chance."

"Oh, sometimes, perhaps," she agreed, with her eyes on the child.

Old Crossby, all red after dinner, looking like a man who had been peppered, and occupying the only arm-chair in the lounge of the Hesperides, smoked a cigar and read an English paper. He was addicted to comments; he liked to retail the news as though by the doing of it he expressed a sense of superiority over his fellows. A man is never too old to show off, and age has methods of its own.

"Ha — here's that Victoria Trust Co. again. If I were the Official Receiver. What? Of course, my dear lady — a case for the Public Prosecutor. Fraudulent scoundrels. Assets — two-pence halfpenny — and some office furniture."

He shook the paper and bristled at it.

"Adventure! What? You said adventure, Mrs. Farren."

"Well, isn't it so, sometimes? Call it financial piracy."

"I'd adventure the scoundrels. Ha! One director unable to attend, doctor's certificate. Another fellow gone abroad for three weeks. Better cut his throat at the end of it."

He glanced at Massingham who was standing very stiff behind a chair, and making an effort to light a pipe. Mr. Crossby liked to be disagreed with; it was productive of argument, and appeared to help his digestion.

"Disgraceful. Our public morals ——"

"Very much on the surface," said Elsie's mother.

"My dear lady ——"

"It is mostly surface. Underneath — most of us do what we want to do. I don't think we can help it."

"That's rank anarchy," said old Crossby. "Civilization could not go on."

"But that's just why it does go on. Don't you think so, Mr. Massingham?"

Massingham, coming out of a stare, and ceasing to watch a fly

crawling on the wall, answered in a slack voice:

"You can't keep the flies away from the sugar."

"Damn it, sir — then we can lock up the sugar."

"That's — death," said the tall man.

But he drifted out and disappeared, and very soon his feet were leaving footprints on the sand, wavering chains of interminable impressions, like the writhings of some repulsive parasitic worm. Massingham had dined, but his body felt empty with a horrible and chilly emptiness. It was not that the words of a red-faced and explosive old man had convinced him of villainy, of guilt, of shame. Mr. Crossby had been no more than a barking dog. The world was full of such dogs, kept chained up to the kennel of convention. It was the black ghost of his self walking beside him on the sands, the shadow of his own ineffectual will, his blank failure that made the soul of him feel like a wet and soiled dish-clout. Failure is at the bottom of the uttermost pit when a man's self-respect can show him no glimmer of light. There is nothing to scramble towards when self-pride goes out like a blown candle flame.

"Sleep — sleep" was his craving, inward cry. "Why do I delay it?"

And yet his anguish had an echo.

"If I could do something decent, just once, get out of this damned self of mine — just for five minutes."

He wandered far over the sands until La Marondou had become a coronet of little lights fastened upon the brow of its bay. He stood and mused, hands hanging slackly, thinking how life went on, and that no man was indispensable except to himself. Were he to be fished up out of the sea that little town over yonder would not blink an eyelid. Mrs. Farren and old Crossby had gone to the Minerva for their game of cards. Elsie was asleep. To-morrow there would be the same game of cards and the same sleeping child. Someone might casually remark "Poor devil!" and fill another pipe.

It must have been somewhere about ten o'clock when Massingham turned towards La Marondou where the little pinpricks of light were dying out in the background of the night. He strolled, keeping no direct course, a man so absorbed in his thoughts and their atmosphere that his senses were mere concern of his body. He arrived at the point where the pine wood marched down towards the sea, and the diminishing lights of La Marondou were visible

between the trunks. He saw six splodges of yellow increase suddenly in the cushion of darkness, six oblong and brilliant panels of light. Queer — that! It drew his attention, fixed it, turned it towards a live conjecture.

What were those lights? A row of windows very brilliantly lit. But surely the glare of them was unusual? The length of his stride increased; he was hurrying almost without realizing the increase in his pace. Something on fire, a house, and in just that place where the Hôtel Hesperides confronted the sea?

He was aware of a sudden tenseness, a tightening of all his fibres, mental and physical. He moved rapidly, his eyes on that pattern glowing against the darkness, and it seemed to him that it was no dead glow, but a live and rampant force, increasing, spreading, devouring.

A little later Massingham knew that it was the Hôtel Hesperides that was on fire. He was running now towards a sound of voices and a suggestion of confused movement upon the sands, a shadow-show of panic. He heard the voice of the fire answering the gentler voice of the sea.

He arrived breathless looking up at that smoking, crackling façade. He ran into a group of people, some of them half-dressed. Figures were running from the houses along the sea-front.

A loud voice — the voice of a woman — dominated the confusion. It belonged to Madame of the hotel.

"Oh, la-la ——! It will burn to the ground. We have nothing in La Marondou. Are we all here?"

A man's voice chattered.

"*La Petite!* Madame Farren — was at the Minerva."

"*Mon Dieu!*"

"*Petite.* Elsie! Where is the child?"

The crowd scuffled and swayed as though it were searching its own interstices for the little figure of a child.

"*Mon Dieu*, she is not here."

"She is up there."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

The fire had begun upon the second floor, and above it the shuttered windows of the upper floor were patches of darkness, and Massingham, looking up at those enigmatic shutters, felt the heart

of him utter a cry that was a cry of mingled anguish and of exultation. He disappeared, and sometime later the crowd saw the shutters of an upper window thrust open, and two figures outlined against the glare.

A shout went up, and then a silence fell. The man up there was waving and calling to those below.

"The staircase is burning. A ladder."

There was no ladder, and a vague and baffled clamour made it known to him.

He called down.

"A sheet — a carpet. Hold it. I must let her drop."

There were fishermen in the crowd. Two of them ran to one of the boats where an old brown sail had been spread out for patching, and it was into this sail, held taut by half a dozen men, that Massingham dropped the child. She was caught by someone and passed to a woman who had come forcing her way through the crowd, using her arms like a swimmer.

One of the fishermen was shouting.

"Jump, monsieur."

Massingham jumped and missed the sail. The crowd saw his body crash upon one of the blue tables in the garden, and for a moment there was stillness, horror.

A little while before he died a woman came and knelt where he was lying on a mattress spread upon the sands. The glare from the burning building played upon his face, but it seemed to shine also with an inward light, white with death, but triumphant.

"Oh — I'm sorry, I'm sorry. What can I say? It was so great of you."

She held one of his hands, and saw his smile. He never spoke a single word to her, for he was beyond speech, but that dying and smiling face of his expressed supreme happiness.

When it was over she knelt awhile, looking at him with wonder, yet becoming vaguely conscious of a mystery that would explain itself, though there had been nothing mysterious in his smile. He had died, satisfied with something. Perhaps it had been with himself!

At "The Golden Palace"

MR. JOHN SMITH RECEIVED A LETTER. IT CAME TO HIM THROUGH the hands of his publishers, addressed to Norman Gage, Esq., and though Mr. John Smith received letters of adoration and abuse, letters from beggars and swindlers and idle women, this particular letter surprised him. It was a novelty. It suggested the fitting of a new pair of wings to the body of some enterprising publicity agent.

Mr. John Smith was quite unknown, happening to be one of those peculiarly shy men who loathe a public parade. Mr. Norman Gage was famous; you met him on the bookstalls; and lying in the laps of young women at Hastings and Bournemouth; and sometimes he was seen in the illustrated papers. Norman Gage had been the victim of a boom.

It would appear that a syndicate with imagination had bought, refurnished and redecorated the Golden Palace Hotel at Cap d'Or on the French Reviera, and that the syndicate's scheme of decoration had not ended with the paint pots and the upholstery. John Smith had seen the phenomenon advertised in the papers. Apparently, the syndicate had conceived the idea of decorating its hotel with human splendours, live successes, celebrities. It proposed to set the latest public idols walking across its carpets. It's patrons should have something to look at. The Golden Palace Hotel should be a temple of fame.

Mr. Smith read his letter while he spooned up his porridge in his Surrey cottage.

"DEAR SIR,

"Should you care to honour us by visiting our hotel for a month we can assure you of a very pleasant welcome. We are inviting a number of celebrities to witness the inauguration of our first season, and we should like you to be one of them.

"May we say — without offence — that no charge will be made. The privilege of your presence in our hotel will amply compensate us. We shall regard it as a favour.

"We remain,

"Yours very faithfully.

____"

Mr. Smith poured out his coffee, looked through the window at the rain, and at his beloved garden lying hooded and grey against the rain-smirched, pine-covered hills. It had been raining for months, a second deluge.

"Filthy weather," he reflected.

And then he smiled. He ate his bacon and continued to smile, for like many shy and quiet men Mr. Smith had a delicate sense of humour.

"It would be rather a joke to go. As myself — of course. Plain Smith. Watch things. A sort of peacock parade. And the sun."

Over his toast and marmalade he came to a decision.

"I'll go."

After breakfast he sat down and wrote to the Golden Palace Hotel, asking them if they could provide him with a little suite facing south, and what their terms would be. In four days he received a reply. The Golden Palace would be delighted to accommodate Mr. Smith. The terms *en pension* were distinctly prodigious.

"Obviously," thought Mr. Smith, "one has to pay for the peacocks."

He wrote off and booked his suite for a day early in February.

Mr. Smith travelled on the Blue Train. On arriving at Cap d'Or in an orgy of sunlight he was met by an equally blue porter who carried more gold braid and buttons than a general of a South American Republic. A brilliantly blue bus conducted Mr. Smith and three other travellers up a winding road towards the immensities of the Golden Palace. He had glimpses of palms, mimosa, beds of cineraria and primula, orange trees, gay people playing tennis, an array of sumptuous private cars. The Golden Palace loomed over him like a vast white cliff, topped by three gilded cupolas from which flew the flags of France, England and the U. S. A.

Bowed through the great doors into a lounge that had the proportions of a classic temple he stood on the edge of a vast blue-and-gold

carpet, a little figure in a brown overcoat, and holding rather self-consciously a soft grey hat. One minion in blue relieved him of his hat; a second helped him off with his overcoat. He was conscious of feeling dirty, crumpled, travel-stained; he remembered that he had not shaved.

A polite and sallow person in a black, tailed coat came and purred to him.

"Mr. Smith——?"

Mr. Smith nodded.

"No. 103. No doubt, sir, you would like to go——"

Again, Mr. Smith nodded. He felt voiceless in this vast place where the very cushions were so superfine and new, and the carpet of fame spread its blue and golds at his feet. He was a little bewildered. In the scattered arm chairs the syndicate had arranged dozens of superior people, superfine young women who stared for a moment till they seemed to discover that a stare at Mr. Smith was not worth while. Mr. Smith had to walk around the legs of a very long and impressive man with an eyeglass who fixed him momentarily with that crystal circle, and then returned with an air of satisfaction to his book.

"Salterhouse—by Jove!" thought Mr. Smith. "The author-publisher. Glad he doesn't know me."

"This way, sir," said the suave person in the tailcoat.

Mr. Smith crossed the immensities of the lounge to the distant music of an orchestra playing ragtime. A flunkey in a scarlet coat, plum coloured breeches and white stockings bowed him and the polite person into a gilded lift. The lift ascended, with Mr. Smith reflecting that this gilded cage was symbolical. He was going up. But he was deposited on the first floor; that too was symbolical. Even to a person of the name of Smith——!

Some tea, a bath and a shave restored Smith's confidence and his sense of humour. Having dressed he strolled along his corridor and down the immensely wide staircase into the lounge. The place had a hushed vastness. It reminded Smith of those spacious interiors in which the American film father smokes his cigar, and is embraced by his daughters, or frowns a corrugated and financial frown in the midst of white pillars and cyclopean furniture. Mr. Smith had some of the feelings of a mouse in a palace.

"Plenty of room for heads to expand," he thought.

At the bottom of the majestic flight of stairs he came upon Vernon Doyle the actor, obviously in a very bad temper, and Doyle was famed for his powers in the expressing of passion.

"Suppose Doyle had one of those letters. Thank heaven — I ——"

The great man passed him, and Smith went on to discover Sir Richard Tempest — an even more popular actor than Doyle, drinking cocktails with a number of expensive ladies, and it seemed to Smith that Sir Richard also was a man displeased. Was it possible that these two public idols ——?

Mr. Smith sat down in a corner with the impression that he might be on the edge of certain piquancies. It was possible that the syndicate had been a little too free with its invitations, and that to get Saturn and Jupiter on to the same Olympus was tactless. But then — actors ——! He peered his way through the consolidating masses of human gorgeousness that had begun to flow and spread over the blue-and-gold carpet and beheld Herbert Zwanker, the novelist. Zwanker's pallid, oriental profile had a stilted peevishness; he looked desirous of biting somebody.

"Might be another novelist somewhere about," thought Mr. Smith; "not me — of course."

"There was! Standing with his back to a pillar Sir Percival Hackett was talking pontifically to three elderly ladies.

"By George!" chuckled Mr. Smith.

For Messrs. Hackett and Zwanker had brought out novels within a week of each other under titles that had had an unfortunate likeness; nor were the plots and the ladies concerned in the plots unalike. And Hackett and Zwanker were "best sellers," and had their photos in the advertising column of *The Times*.

Mr. Smith crinkled up his eyelids.

"I wonder if people have been telling Sir Percival how they enjoyed reading his "Piccadilly Perfumes."

As a matter of fact they had. "Piccadilly Perfumes" of course — had come from the pen of Mr. Zwanker.

Somehow and somewhere during the evening Mr. Smith fell into conversation with an elderly woman whom the strenuous life of The Golden Palace had washed into an obscure corner of the *Salle des Fêtes*. Feeling perdu in this world of nobodies who looked

somebodies, and of somebodies who looked nobodies, he had craved a quiet corner, and had discovered this pathetic figure of bourgeois bewilderment isolated and afraid. For such places as The Golden Palace impose fear upon certain simple souls.

The old lady had let her brocade bag slide from her stout knees to the floor. Mr. Smith picked it up for her.

"Excuse me — you have dropped your bag."

She reacted to the obvious, and to the kindness of his quiet voice.

"Much obliged to you — I'm sure."

Mr. Smith sat down beside her as he might have sat down beside a lost and bemused child. She looked very worthy in her Sunday best, and straining in it under the vague lines of its unworthiness. She was the eternal worker, the admirable washerwoman whirled breathlessly into the rectory drawing-room which was full of her imagined betters.

"Now — what on earth are you doing here?" thought Mr. Smith.

Aloud he remarked: "Very smart here to-night."

She gave him a round and appealing glance. Mr. Smith looked a nobody, a very ordinary sort of man, and she was ready to throw her poor flustered arms round the neck of any ordinary person.

"Ain't you dancing?"

"I can't dance."

"Dear, dear."

They surveyed the dancers walking gorgeously to music in the centre of a vastness surrounded by a milky-way of little tables.

"The fine flowering of our civilization," said Mr. Smith; "for these — the brown spiders spin. It's very hot in here."

"Very hot," said she, daring to fan herself with a handkerchief.

Mr. Smith brought out a cigarette case.

"Do you mind?"

"Not me. Wish you'd smoke a pipe."

"Mine's upstairs. They'd throw me out — you know — if I smoked a pipe in here."

She breathed heavily.

"I'd find Buckingham Palace more 'omely. Sure I should."

"No doubt about it. My name's Smith."

She seemed to inhale the plain perfume of his name, to breathe it in with infinite pleasure and satisfaction. Smith. Blessed Smith.

Surbiton and Highbury! The Civil Service Stores! A Bayswater bus!

"Mine's Jenkins."

"Thank you," said he; "everybody's so celebrated here."

"Awful. Then you ain't anybody."

"No."

"Like me."

"Yes."

He could feel her expand until he could imagine her good simple corsage creaking with relief.

"You never know where you are. Dukes and actresses — and bishops."

"I haven't seen a bishop."

"And the waiters, and the feller in the red coat who brings the shoes, and the chambermaids! I have two of them. Feel I'm choking."

"Same here," said Mr. Smith. "How many courses did you get through at dinner? Oh, for suet pudding and treacle! Lovely!"

She began to glow.

"I wouldn't 'ave come here ——"

"What made you come?" he asked.

"My girl. She's upstairs laid up with flu. When Jenkins was alive we went to Brighton. Jenkins & Snodhouse we were. Grocery. Twenty shops. There — but I'm swanking."

Mr. Smith smiled.

"That's what this place is for, Mrs. Jenkins. The Swank House. Peacocks! Just — look."

She began to regard the pageant of life with the air of a good lady at a Lord Mayor's show.

"Do you know any of them?"

"Lots — by sight. I used to be a newspaper man. That tall man there with the flat nose. Now — who do you think ——?"

"Don't know — I'm sure."

"Mr. Billy Crinch — the boxer."

"Bless us!"

"And that fair woman with eyes like saucers."

"Yes."

"Madge Varsity — the actress."

"Dear — dear."

"And that tall, very thin man with the red face and the Roman nose, Duncan York — the tennis player."

Mr. Smith liked the looks of Duncan York; he was one of the few easy and unaffected figures, moving to its own music, and not troubling himself about syncopated swank. Mrs. Jenkins agreed with Smith in liking the looks of Mr. Duncan York.

"He's a nice feller."

She managed the aspirate that time, and went on to say that her daughter had a great admiration for Mr. York, and that Doris had collected his autograph at Wimbledon, and that she was raging to get downstairs and meet the expert on the Golden Palace tennis courts.

"And very glad I shall be, Mr. Smith. Doris isn't pushed off her perch — like I am. I'm an old woman. Things frighten me."

"What things? Celebrities? All these expensive people?"

"Yes. Do you know I have to clench my hands, and make myself walk into that dining-room, and when once I'm in a chair in that lounge — I feel I daren't move out of it. Simply daren't, sir. I suppose you think that's silly."

"Not silly — exactly — but unnecessary. Look here, I'll let you into a secret if you'll promise ——"

"I'll promise — you — anything."

"Not even to Doris?"

"Not even to Doris."

"Well — a lot of these celebrities are paid to be here; no, not exactly paid. They are given a month's free board and lodging just for us to look at. Us — you and I. We pay. It's our Zoo. All you have to think of when you see Mr. Zwanker the novelist or Sir Richard Tempest the actor or Mr. Gall the playwright is — 'There's my Mr. Zwanker, or my Mr. Gall, just brought down here to show off for me in public.' That's all. It's nothing more or less than a Zoo."

She crooned like a delighted baby.

"There, now! Well, I never!"

"Besides" — and he pointed a cigarette at the crowd, "do you think all these expensive people came down here to look at us. Not a bit of it. They came to be looked at. Peacocks and peahens. Hundred guinea frocks. They came down here to swank, to impress the Smiths and the Jenkins. Mr. Zwanker doesn't want to see Sir

Percival Hackett; he went sick at the very sight of him. They don't want to look at each other; they want to be looked at. Just you stare as though you were at the Zoo. I'm going to."

She patted Mr. Smith's sleeve.

"You are a comfortable man. I've been fair miserable here. I tell you I've cried myself to sleep. Doris won't even let me make a cup of tea in my own bedroom, though I have got a nice little spirit-stove. She says it's not done."

"Well — I'm going to do it," said Mr. Smith. "I've got a little suite. I'll invite you to bring your teabasket along — and we'll make tea."

Mrs. Jenkins regarded him as though he were the angel Michael who had come to earth and assumed the attributes of a complete and admirable Smith.

It did not take the little novelist long to discover that the syndicate had behaved with too much precipitation in the distribution of its invitations to the world of fame. There should be no more than two members of each species in the ark, male and female, lion and lioness. Half a dozen lions, six bears, three or four trumpety elephants and half a score hyenas made for discord. They met and glowered and snarled, or passed by with airs of savage disdain.

It was amusing to Mr. Smith.

Also, it seemed a pity. It was not fair on Miss Madge Varsity that Miss Cherry Merrow — a star of equal magnitude, and ten years younger — should be placed to shine at the very next table. It might be amusing to watch Zwanker and Sir Percival Hackett squabbling over a disputed point on a tennis court during an American tournament, but the incident lacked the subtlety of a Piccadilly perfume. And two rival actor-managers did not desire to lie down together like lambs.

Meanwhile, he had made himself responsible for Mrs. Jenkins and her holiday, and for the acute mortal discomforts suffered by that admirable old lady. To Mr. Smith she was admirable because she liked him, and because she desired to be herself, and because she was possessed of a delightful shrewdness, and a love of flowers. He found her pottering about the gardens of The Golden Palace, caressing with the point of a sunshade the faces of the violas and the marigolds.

"The pretty dears. If it wasn't for the stooping, Mr. Smith. Stooping beats me."

She had a garden at Ealing.

"Mr. Jenkins — he did love his roses. Dwarfs. But give me standards. I can get my nose to a standard."

"I have a garden in Surrey," said Mr. Smith, "I get up at six in the morning."

"Do you now. Before you go up to your business. That's what Jenkins used to do."

He asked after her daughter, and became aware of a clouding of her plump and beneficent countenance.

"Oh, Doris is getting up to-day. She has got determination, Doris has. It's the tennis."

Mr. Smith was quick to feel that Doris threw some sort of shadow across Mrs. Jenkins' bland soul.

"Keen on tennis — is she?"

"Played at Wimbledon last year. And then — of course ——"

"Singles or doubles?" asked Mr. Smith.

"I'm thinking,'" said her mother, "that Doris is keener on doubles — just now. Unusual — of course — in these days. But if you ask me ——"

"You don't object."

"I'll settle a thousand a year on her, sir, just as I did on Flo and Bertie. Children don't grow all on lavender bushes, Mr. Smith."

"I suppose not," said the shy man. "Give me a good old fashioned cabbage rose."

"Oh — you're right. I can't get used to all these new young fiery things."

Miss Doris Jenkins came down to dinner that evening, and Mr. Smith, by inclining his head a little to the left and looking between the heads of a Bradford City Father and an American oil magnate, was able to investigate her. She was just like the hundreds of other young women who passed through the doors of The Golden Palace; tall, thin, flat, shingled, fair, with the blue eyes of the huntress whether the quarry happened to be tennis balls or men. She smoked cigarettes between the courses. She had very thin lips tinted a coral-scarlet. She was rather silent; she watched her mother.

And John Smith pitied Mrs. Jenkins. He could almost hear Miss

Jenkins' sharp and reproving whisper:

"Mother, don't do that."

Doris had the old lady in her pocket, or like a bewildered old dog on the end of a string. She was in control. She was youth — greedy and dominant.

Afterwards in the lounge Mr. Smith strolled across to where Miss Jenkins was enjoying a liqueur and her coffee, while she watched for the appearance of a certain person. Her mother gave him a glance that was apologetic, alarmed, appealing.

"Doris — this is Mr. Smith."

Miss Jenkins said "Oh," looked in another direction, and then scrutinised the knees of Mr. Smith's dress trousers. They were not so well pressed as they might have been.

"Good of you to look after mother."

"Not at all — your mother ——"

But Miss Jenkins had not finished.

"Now I'm down — you need not suffer from a sense of duty. I shall be around."

She was quite the rudest young woman that Mr. Smith had ever met, and while he was recovering his breath and trying not to look at her mother's discomfited face, she lit a cigarette.

"Doris," said her mother — "I ——"

"That's all right, mater. Nothing like hitting a clean ball."

Mr. Smith bowed and disappeared, but only behind one of the massive white piers close to the chairs of the Jenkins mother and daughter. He was able to hear what was said.

"My dear — I won't be spoken to ——"

"Tut-tut," said the girl; "a place like this is full of spongers. Has he tried to borrow ——?"

"Doris!"

"Or to get you to play bridge?"

"Monstrous!"

"Well — what is he? Everybody who matters here is labelled. Fellow of the name of Smith; shabby trousers. On the look out ——"

"Doris!"

Mr. Smith strolled away, and took a chair near the grand staircase. He felt a little hot, a little amused, a little angry. Evidently the daughter objected to the old lady picking up a plain bone of her

own; the bone might be tainted; foolish old women had to be protected. And evidently Mrs. Jenkins had received a scolding; she had been talking about her Mr. Smith; and the daughter, armed and alert, had answered — "I'll Mr. Smith him." But how delicious, and suburban and absurd.

Did Miss Doris believe that he had matrimonial schemes?

It was possible. Nothing is impossible to people who live in this Palace of Gold. Was there not an old painted grandmother in a wig sitting at the very next table to him with a husband who looked less than thirty?

But he felt rather sick. He agreed with Mrs. Jenkins that children did not all grow on lavender bushes. Miss Doris had the head of a white teazle.

Then he observed something else.

Duncan York came down the grand staircase, and before he could move ten paces across the carpet of blue and gold, Miss Jenkins had him. She was there before any other women.

"Hallo, Duncan; heard you were here."

She stared him straight in the eyes, unflinchingly. Her red mouth was predatory and smiling.

"Let's go and dance; I'm a bit off colour. Suppose I look it. This damned flu."

"Yes, it's a great noosance, isn't it," said the tall man in his gentle voice. "Got a partner for the mixed doubles?"

"Well — what about it?"

Brazenly she carried him off.

Mr. Smith had the hardihood to return to the old lady and to take the empty chair beside her, nor did he refer in any way to the snubbing that he had received. Mrs. Jenkins looked very unhappy. To be made at the age of sixty-five to feel yourself your daughter's social inferior was not conducive to happiness.

"I wish I were at home. I'd like to see my daffodils and hyacinths coming up."

"Well — why not?"

Mrs. Jenkins had her sense of duty to Doris, but Mr. Smith explained to her that this anxiety with respect to Doris was both superfluous and exhausting.

"These young women —— Why ——? Well, if Doris were a boy

— you might be justified in feeling anxious. I think Miss Jenkins is quite capable of looking after herself. Why not go home?"

"All by myself? My dear sir — I get so flustered."

"I'm going home next week. I should be delighted to act as your courier."

Mrs. Jenkins looked both eager and frightened.

"But — there's Doris — you see ——"

"Doris wouldn't approve?"

Mrs. Jenkins nodded.

"She has got such queer notions. She might be the mother, Mr. Smith, and I — the daughter."

"The fact is — your daughter would not approve of me —— Quite natural. A mere Smith. Smith conjures up suspicion. By the way — didn't I lend you a book by a chap named Norman Gage?"

The digression puzzled Mrs. Jenkins.

"I ought to have returned it. Doris has it — I'll ask her ——"

"So Doris reads?"

"She has had every one of Gage's books out of our circulating library. All except the one ——"

"Ah, that was his last. So — she likes the stuff?"

"The man's her pet author."

"That's rather interesting," said Mr. Smith, "for I happen to be Norman Gage."

He smiled, and his smile was so deep and rich that it spread itself through the whole of Mrs. Jenkins' being until she saw the joke and warmed to it, and her pink face became suffused with mischievous delight.

"There — now! Who would have thought it ——? Oh, begging your pardon, Mr. Smith. But don't anybody know?"

"Not a soul. It's my secret and — yours. You have got to keep it — you know."

She swayed with comfortable exultation in her chair. For she, Mary Jenkins, had captured a real celebrity, caught him on her own hook, and unaided. He was hers. He was a secret — her secret.

"Can't I tell Doris?"

"Don't you think we might wait a little?"

Hugging the proud humour of the thing, she agreed.

Before going to bed Mr. Smith added a delicate touch of colour

to the conspiracy. He asked Mrs. Jenkins to return him the copy of his latest book while her daughter was away dancing with Duncan York. He promised to return it to her in the morning.

"Your daughter has not finished it, I suppose?"

"Not yet."

"Good."

A page-boy brought the copy of "A Summer Silence" to Mrs. Jenkins' door while she was breakfasting, and on examining the volumes he found on the fly leaf an inscription to herself. "To my friend Mary Jenkins from Norman Gage." She sat and stared at it; she held the volume to a broad plump nose as though the book were a bouquet; she was tremendously and comfortably elated. A real, live celebrity had presented her with a trophy. Now, what would Miss Doris make of that?

Undoubtedly, Mrs. Jenkins did present a very different front to her daughter when Mrs. Jenkins was discovered in the garden sitting under a white-and-orange umbrella, and listening to the hotel orchestra. She had a pink, snug, comfortable look, almost suggesting a big and hearty baby that was ready to crow. In fact, from the exchange of the first few words the daughter discovered in the mother a mental resiliency that in any other person she would have described as "cockiness." Mrs. Jenkins appeared to be much more surely seated on her perch.

Doris had missed the copy of "A Summer Silence."

"What have you done with that book of Gage's?"

"It's in my room. I wanted to read part of it — again."

"Dash it, I wish you would leave my things alone."

"Well, it is my book, my dear," said her mother with complacent serenity; "if you look on the table in my window."

Doris disappeared. The hour was ten o'clock. At eleven she had arranged to play a practice single with Duncan York, and she had proposed to spend the intervening hour in finishing Norman Gage's book. Having ascended in the gilded cage to the first floor and recovered "A Summer Silence" she chose a sunny corner on the terrace where Duncan would be able to find her.

She opened the book casually in her lap. The binding of it was still somewhat stiff and new, and the leaves — turning of themselves — left the fly leaf partly exposed. Her eyes detected the handwriting,

and with astonishment she read: "To my friend Mary Jenkins from Norman Gage."

It was not easy to surprise Miss Jenkins, very rarely did a ball catch her on the wrong foot, but on this particular occasion she went in search of an immediate explanation. Her mother a friend of Norman Gage's! It sounded preposterous, incredible.

"What's this?"

Again she was made to think of a pink and confident infant preparing to crow.

"What's what, my dear?"

"This. You don't know Norman Gage."

"Oh — don't I!" said the old lady, with an expression that suggested that old tag containing references to a grandmother and eggs.

Her daughter looked as though she were standing to receive a nasty American service on the sunny side of the court.

"But — you don't know him."

"But I do."

"He's not staying here."

"My dear, he is, incognito. Modest — you know. Doesn't like self-advertisement."

She was aware — and most deliciously aware — of the fact that her daughter was annoyed.

"I can't introduce you, my dear, because nobody is supposed to know — except me. More than two can't keep a secret."

She smiled round and beyond her daughter at someone who was strolling towards them.

"Good morning, Mr. Smith."

Mr. Smith gave the mother a smile, the smile of a fellow conspirator.

"Do you mind if I smoke my pipe here?"

"Please do — makes me feel at home."

Miss Jenkins had closed the book and tucked it under her arm. She was still wearing her tennis face.

"I'm going to look for Duncan," she said; "we are knocking a few balls over the net at eleven."

The Hesperides

IT BEGAN AT THE FEAST OF ST. PANCEAZIO, WHEN THE SHEPHERDS CAME down from the mountains, playing upon their pipes, and a bonfire is lit in the Piazza Santa Maria.

It began with a quarrel about a woman, in a country where men still quarrel about women. A superfluous excitement. For being an ancient and a northerner I applaud our young men when they refuse to be set alight in a market-place that is glutted.

But in this case the woman was worth it. She — Francesca — sold lace in the shop of her father, Tadeo Albertini. They were Neapolitans. She had a head of hair such as Titian loved to paint, only there was more bronze in it and less gold, and when her great brown eyes looked at you over a piece of lace, you bought for your sisters and your nieces more than they deserved.

Cesca was a good girl and old-fashioned. Obviously, she would marry and have children and adore them and be adored. She belonged to an age that left quarrelling to the men — if quarrelling was unavoidable. She had little in common with the Eton cropped young woman — who — when involved in a squabble with an Italian porter — resented chivalrous interference. I had been the interferer.

"Keep out. I — can chalk this dago, thank you."

I had kept out.

But to revert to the festa of St. Panceazio, and two hot-headed men and Francesca, and the bonfire, and the piping shepherds, and the figure of the Saint carried upon a platform by eight stout young men. It was a wonderful winter night. The stars might have been the stars over Bethlehem. The Piazza Santa Maria looked like a yellow flower into the cup of which God had dropped a basket of golden light. Sparks flew upwards. Children shouted and scrambled. Monte Gandolfo was full of southern life.

Big Cesare Grandi was with Francesca and her mother. Old

Grandi — Cesare's father — kept the Ristorante Garibaldi in the Corso. He had money. He bought the Hotel Hesperides below the castle, and was putting his son into it.

So Francesco was with Cesare and wanted to be with him. They were standing under a plane tree and close to the stone water-cistern where the mules and horses drank on their way to the upper town. I happened to be close by with two Americans from the Hotel Palmona.

Then came the other man, one Luigi Bissolo, a little, thick-set fellow with staring eyes and a nasty mouth. His father kept an antique shop by the cathedral, and Luigi thought himself no thin wine. He was something of a dandy, a brisk, well buttoned up, swaggering lad, much fancied by the women. He had a voice. He played the mandolin. When he sang "*O — sole mio*" the heavens melted.

Luigi was jealous. He walked up to Cesare and the two Albertini women and placed himself beside Francesca. He stood very close to her, looking across her at Cesare who, with all his bigness, was rather slow and stately. No one had ever seen Cesare quarrel; he was a quiet fellow who looked at you very straightly, and spoke slowly out of his black beard.

I was near enough to hear what was said, and it was not much.

"You look — a little bored, my dear."

It appeared to me that he nudged Cesare's arm with his.

"Has Cesare forgotten to give you something to drink?"

I saw the girl make a movement as though shrugging him off, while Cesare, perfectly mute, stared at the bonfire, but there was something in the set of his head that made me think of an angry and waiting dog.

"Leave me alone, please."

Luigi laughed. I think he despised Cesare, and doubted his courage, and his blood was hot and bad in him.

"When a girl says no ——"

He pressed his arm against hers, and when she stiffened herself, he jostled her gently against Cesare.

"He — won't mind. He never minds — anything."

But Luigi was wrong. It happened very suddenly, for Cesare's right arm swung round behind Cesca's back, and caught Bissolo

by the collar. He twisted him round, and getting a grip of another portion of his clothes, carried him like a rolled up carpet, and soused him into the water-trough.

There was much splashing. It is probable that Luigi tried to get at his knife, but Cesare pressed him down into the water, and held him there. Insolence should be either drowned or sobered.

It was the women who intervened. Probably they did not want to see Cesare on trial for drowning a man in a water-trough, so Luigi was lifted out, breathless and very full of water. The crowd was delighted, for it was a festive occasion.

"Take away his knife," said Cesare, still holding Bissolo's wrists.

It was found and taken away, but the crowd had not finished with the joke. Luigi was not loved; he had been — on occasions — too successful a lover.

"Poor fellow, he will catch his death of cold."

"His clothes should be dried."

"To the bonfire!"

Half a dozen uproarious lads collected Luigi from Cesare's hands. They carried him to the bonfire, and in spite of his kickings and cursings held him upside down in front of the blaze. An urchin, whom Luigi had cuffed a few days ago, took revenge by tickling Bissolo's inverted face with the end of an old whip.

That — too — was the end of Luigi in Monte Gandolfo — at least, for a period. His dignity had been exposed to the crowd. The girls laughed when they met him in the streets; the children called after him: "Who was roasted like a chestnut!" He sulked. So sullen was he that he did not appear to consider it to be his duty to try and knife Cesare, or perhaps he was afraid of Cesare, the man who did not stand and jabber, but picked his man up and either smashed or drowned him.

And one day Luigi disappeared. He took with him an old valise, and caught the train to Rome. Later it was known in Monte Gandolfo that Luigi Bissolo had gone to South America to regrow a diminished self-esteem. Monte Gandolfo thought no more of him for a while, though Italians are always Italians, and it is the dream of the wanderer to return.

Meanwhile old Grandi died, and left the Hotel Hesperides and some thousands of lire to his son. Cesare had married Francesca;

they had three children in three years, two girls and a boy. The Hotel Hesperides flourished. Cesare loved his hotel almost as he loved his wife. It had the best situation in Monte Gandolfo.

Cesare advertised the "view" on his hotel cards. It was "superb" — "magnificent" — "unrivalled." And indeed it was so. For three consecutive seasons I had a window overlooking the sea. All was a great blueness of sea and sky, with olive groves and lemons in the valleys, and Monte Gandolfo trailing left and right under the amethyst of the mountains. Cesare had a quite famous garden in front of his hotel, with not a single building to obscure the view. Below the garden lay a steep stretch of half derelict olive groves where a few goats grazed, and the land belonged to a rather disreputable and eccentric old fellow who kept a wine shop in the town.

I believe that his wife was always at Cesare to buy this piece of land. Sometimes a woman has more vision. But Cesare was at his ease. No one would ever build there; the ground was too steep; a road would have to be cut in the rock; to build there would cost an immense sum of money.

"Half a million lire, *cara mia*."

He shrugged his big shoulders. He was confident that his "belle vista" was as safe as Aetna. Besides — he had money put by. His money was as good as anybody else's. If there was any talk of old Tadeo's land being sold, he — Cesare — would buy it.

It was the over-confidence of bigness, the optimism of a large nature that thinks too well of the world. Cesare was prosperous; he was putting on weight; his hotel had the finest view for a hundred miles along the coast. He had healthy children, a happy and handsome wife.

And then the first blow fell, suddenly and without any warning. It was the end of the season, and Cesare, taking a siesta under a vine, was roused by his oldest child — a boy, Paolo.

"Father — come and look. There are men cutting down the olive trees ——"

Cesare stretched himself.

"What olive trees?"

"On old Tadeo's ground — below the garden."

"What!"

"And there are other men driving in posts."

Cesare got up rather hurriedly. He went down the steps to the terrace at the bottom of the Hesperides garden, and he saw what his son had seen, men cutting down the old olive trees, and others setting out white posts. They were strange men, too; they did not belong to Monte Gandolfo.

Cesare called to one of them:

"Hallo. What's happening?"

The workmen strolled to the bottom of the wall.

"They say they are going to build an hotel here."

Cesare went rather white above his black beard. He hurried straight up through the garden, and out into the town to Tadeo's wine shop. He found old Tadeo reading a greasy paper, and looking as pleased as a cat on a cushion.

"What's this? Is it true that you have sold those olive terraces?"

Yes, it was quite true.

"And to whom?"

"A syndicate. They paid me——"

"Mother of God," thundered Cesare, "why did you not come to me?"

Tadeo smiled down his fat nose.

"I did not think. You have all the land you need. The price was very good."

"But — why ——?"

"The syndicate is going to build an hotel there, a very big hotel."

"Who is the syndicate?"

"I do not know," said Tadeo; "I only know the lawyer."

Cesare went out into the street like a man coming out of a bank that had stopped payment. I remember his wife telling me that he came back to the Hesperides, and sat down in a chair and would say nothing for quite five minutes. He appeared dumb. He was trying to realize what this thing meant to him and to his beloved hotel, and how it was that no news had leaked out, for few things could happen in Monte Gandolfo without half the town knowing it. And he had been puzzled by the old wine-seller's smile.

"I have been a fool, Cesca, a fool. It was you who had the eyes. A hotel in front of my hotel, the view ruined, my unique situation stolen!"

He was very near to tears.

"My dear," said she, "most probably it is a trick to make you buy at a big price. Find out. Write to this lawyer. They are trying to frighten you."

But Cesare was not to be reassured. He had a feeling that the disaster was not to be averted, and he was right.

For the syndicate continued to be no more than a syndicate, a vague, intangible human shape that functioned through lawyer and architect, and contractor. Cesare did get into touch with old Tadeo's lawyer, but the interview brought him no comfort. The lawyer, long and thin, and dry as a bundle of sticks, disclosed nothing save that a syndicate had bought the ground and was putting up an hotel. There was no plot to extract blackmail from the padrone of the Hesperides. This was a business proposition; Monte Gandolfo was becoming very popular; the syndicate proposed to make their hotel the most luxurious and notable establishment in Southern Italy.

Poor Cesare felt as helpless as a chained bear. The season was over, and Monte Gandolfo preparing to go to sleep, but down below there, beyond the garden of the Hesperides, men were busy blasting out the very bowels of the hill. A new road was being cut, a raw gash in the hillside. Lorries snorted; steel girders were carried clanking and clanging up the Corso; men swarmed; the air was full of dust and noise. Every now and again there would be a dull explosion and the rumble of falling stone. A platform was being prepared for the foundations.

Cesare, hanging a grim and gloomy face over the wall, watched all this pother. He wondered how close they were going to cut the rock, for if they interfered with the stability of his wall——

He too tried a lawyer, but nothing came of it. The syndicate's lawyer was delighted to inform Signor Grandi's representative that they were being very careful not to interfere in any way with Cesare's property.

"Yes," said the big man bitterly, "but they are blinding the eyes of my hotel. It is murder. They will kill my bella vista."

Which was true. How true it was Cesare realized when the walls began to rise. It was to be an immense structure; it was to be called the Hotel Splendide. His wife told me afterwards that all that summer Cesare could not sleep. He grew thin; he would not eat.

She tried to get him away to their little place in the mountains, but he refused to leave Monte Gandolfo. He seemed to be fascinated in a horrid sort of way by those rising walls that began to tower like a huge barricade in front of the Hesperides.

Every morning very early he would get out of bed and go to the window and gaze.

"More sky gone. We shall not see the sea."

Poor Cesca, she must have had a terrible time with him. Though he did not fly into rages, but moped about like a man whose heart was being eaten away out of his body. His melancholy was profound, which is not to be wondered at when he was starving himself of food and sleep. Moreover he was suffering intense humiliation. He was forever accusing himself for the disaster, for he would not be persuaded that it was anything but a disaster.

"I was a fool — I was blind. It need never have happened. Had I listened to you ——"

She did her best to comfort him. She pointed out that the Splendide could not be of such vastness as to eat up all the sea and sky. The garden of the Hesperides would still be the most charming garden in Monte Gandolfo.

But Cesare would not be comforted.

All that summer the building went on. Masons, labourers, carpenters swarmed about the place, for it was the syndicate's intention to complete the hotel before the end of the year, and to open it in January at the beginning of the new season. Already they were advertising the new establishment.

HOTEL SPLENDIDE — MONTE GANDOLFO
OPEN IN JANUARY
SUPERB NEW BUILDING. SUPERB VIEWS. SUPERB CUISINE.

By November the roof was on. It was a huge flat expanse surrounded by a crenellated parapet, with bright, yellow cupolas at the angles. It was to be treated as a promenade and a garden. The great building towered up in front of the Hesperides, menacing it with its shadow, and destroying all the privacy of Cesare's garden. Instead of blue sky and blue sea you looked at rows and rows of windows, and all the ugliness of the new hotel's kitchen and service

departments. Almost, the ugliness of the building as seen from the Hesperides seemed studied.

Cesare's mood changed. Instead of being gloomy, and despairing, he began to be angry. He talked of going to law, of spending his last lira in fighting these people who had murdered his "view."

His wife — after the way of women who are mothers — was all for peace.

"Wait — my dear. Bigness is not everything. That barrack of a place may prove a failure. Some day — you may be able to buy it up. Keep your money, and a stiff face."

But Cesare's anger was to have good cause. It happened one day that he was walking on his terrace under the shadow of the new hotel when he heard a voice hailing him.

"Good day, Signor Grandi, good day to you."

Cesare looked up. The voice had come from above, but for a moment he could not locate its owner.

"I am rather high up, Signor Grandi, rather high up."

Some men had been erecting a flagstaff on the roof of the Splendide, and when Cesare raised his eyes, he saw a figure up above in a line with the new flagstaff. The figure was leaning over the parapet. A hand raised a hat. The face up above had a distant grin.

"Hallo, Cesare, how do you like my hotel?"

Cesare stood very still, for the man up there was Luigi Bissolo, smirking against the blue sky, round and plump and arrogant.

"So — so it is you!" said Cesare.

Men were hammering in the rooms of the Splendide, and the two voices engaged each other like voices shouting through the rattle of musketry.

"Yes, this is my hotel. How do you like it?"

Cesare managed to keep his temper in the face of Luigi's mocking spite.

"It is very big."

"Makes your place look small, hey?"

"You think so?"

"And rather foolish."

"That may depend——"

"Do you want to sell, Cesare? We might be able to use your little place as an annexe."

Cesare's teeth showed white in his black beard. He stared up at Luigi for some seconds, and then turned about and walked away into his garden. He felt that there was murder in him.

Cesare found his wife hemming new sheets.

"Guess — whom I have seen."

She looked at him anxiously.

"What do you mean, Cesare?"

"The syndicate, the creature who has killed my hotel. Do you remember Luigi Bissolo?"

"Luigi!"

"He whom I ducked in the water trough. He is up there on the roof of his tower of Babylon — mocking me. A nice revenge — what!"

"Are you dreaming?"

"No, I am not dreaming. But let him be careful. He angered me — once. Next time — this time ——"

Francesca looked frightened. She had good cause to be afraid, but she was a wise woman, and she did not intensify her husband's anger by trying to oppose it. She too was angry; she had every right to soothe his anger by sharing it and sympathizing with it.

"The wretch! The mean little monkey! But do not let him see that we are angry. Say nothing, Cesare. We will keep steady faces. He must not be allowed to exult."

Grandi seemed to reflect.

"Yes, that's true," he agreed; "do not open your heart to the knife."

But Francesca's fear remained, now that Luigi had shown himself with a vengeance. He had been very lucky in South America; also he had found rich men who were ready to join him in the exploiting of Monte Gandolfo. It was to be one of the little pleasure towns of Europe and America. Luigi, fat and well-dressed, drove about the town in a big motor-car; he was always smoking a cigar; he never appeared to walk anywhere. He was a great man; he allowed Monte Gandolfo to appreciate his greatness. Monte Gandolfo had seen him ducked in a water-trough, but now — somebody else would do the ducking.

He allowed himself to speak of Cesare with good-natured con-

tempt and pity.

"Poor fellow. This is what comes of being slow and old-fashioned. I wanted that view—yes. He could have had it had he been less of a fool. I'll show you people how to make money."

Bissolo was a man of imagination. That is to say he conceived a particular way of making himself appear more offensively triumphant in the eyes of his old enemy. He was one of those vicious little men who can wait for an opportunity, and use it to the last rub, when it comes. The Splendide was being garnished for the approaching season; gardeners were at work; tons of earth were dumped on the rocky surface that had been cut and blasted out of the hillside. Every morning Bissolo would ascend to the roof, and with his own hands hoist the Italian flag on the flagstaff. He would stand and stare down into the Hesperides garden and or at the windows of the little hotel. If he caught sight of Cesare he would raise his hat mockingly. And every evening he would go through the performance of lowering the flag saluting his old enemy.

Cesare got into the way of watching and waiting for this piece of dumb show. He knew that Luigi meant it to be as the crowing of a cock, and each day the performance brought Cesare nearer to his final fury. Bissolo would hoist that flag and wave his hat once too often.

Now, women are queer. Francesca got it into her head that the business would end in a tragedy, and she watched her man as a mother watches a very young child who is just able to walk. For days she did not let Cesare out of her sight.

One evening, looking through the glass door of her husband's little office she saw him handling a gun that he kept there, and so intent and absorbed was he that he did not realize that he was being watched.

She went in. Cesare was slipping a couple of cartridges into the breach.

"What are you doing?"

He was startled, but his face was gloomy and stubborn.

"Nothing. Preparing for a little shooting."

Her fear made her strong.

"Cesare, give me that gun."

"Nonsense. If I want to bring a bird down off the roof of that cursed hotel——"

"Give me the gun."

But he would not, and when she tried to take it from him he resisted her and tried to push her off.

"Let be. This is no woman's affair——"

"Cesare——!"

And suddenly she burst into tears; she went down on her knees.

"All these years — you have loved me. We have been so happy. I have given you children — and now——"

Cesare stood and stared. Cesca was not a woman for tears. His face twitched. And then — something — seemed to break in him. He put the gun down on the table and bent over his wife.

"*Cara mia,* do not weep. If you wish it — you shall have the gun."

She flung her arms round his neck and held him.

"Oh — my love, do not kill me by some wild deed. Am I not more to you — than that little braggart. Leave it to God, Cesare, leave it to God."

He kissed her.

"My Cesca——"

"Leave it to the good God. Promise."

"I promise," he said.

She got him to kneel beside her, and like a child she made him utter a simple prayer. Let God judge between them. They would be patient; they would bear what they might be made to bear.

And in a most strange way did God seem to answer Francesca's prayer. He judged like the old God of thunder and of justice. It happened the very next day at the very time when Luigi Bissolo, alone in the new hotel, was preparing to lower the flag and to grin his good night at the Hotel Hesperides.

There came a shock, a shuddering of the earth. All Monte Gandolfo knew the meaning of that tremor, and came rushing from its doors. It was a strange, panic moment, and men and women stood still in the streets, looking at each other and waiting. Everyone in Monte Gandolfo heard the big bells of the cathedral utter one deep and single note, though it was known afterwards that no hand touched the rope.

"It is the voice of God," said an old woman in the midst of a strange silence.

From the upper town came a sudden rumbling. A man, looking up towards the castle, raised his arms and uttered a loud cry.

"The hotel — Luigi's new hotel ——!"

The Splendide seemed to crack, to topple, and then to fall forward like a child's house of bricks. The hillside, shaken by the tremor, had cracked and given way under it. The great building went crashing like an avalanche of stone.

And there stood the Hotel Hesperides and its garden untouched — as of old — above a great grey scar where the mass of rock and masonry had slid thundering and smoking into the valley below.

Elizabeth

He wore rough tweeds, a soft collar, and a cherry-coloured tie. Burnt brown, slightly grizzled, lean and hard, he suggested an alert and large dog, dignified and sound of temper. His eyes were very blue, clear, shrewd and clean.

Each day after breakfast and a pipe in the lounge he would disappear. He would take the road to the moor, going steadily up hill with that easy, loping stride, hatless, slung round with a haversack, a pair of field-glasses, and a neatly rolled raincoat. He carried an ash stick shod with a pointed iron ferule.

His name was Grimshaw, a name well-known to lovers of wild life; he had travelled all over the world; there had been books by him on the bird life of Northern Africa, on a winter in Kashmir, on three years of wandering in Brazil. His age was anything around fifty, but he was one of those men whose age does not seem to matter.

The Cressford Arms was a very notable old country inn. Built over the site of Tawbridge Abbey, and, possessed of some of the abbey gardens, it had dignity and repose. It rose a little above the modern bustle. It was patronized by both the old and the new world — men who came to fish or to paint, motorists who stayed to eat and to sleep. A remarkable inn, and remarkably well run, it contained for the very few who had the inward eye a rather remarkable woman.

Everyone, or at least every man, who put up at the Cressford Arms noticed Elizabeth Royle. She was the head-waitress; she had held the post for five years. A dark woman, tall, superbly built, with a fine carriage of the shoulders and the head, she made the dining-room of the Cressford Arms a notable room. She was austere, serene, stately, gentle, moving like a priestess, large eyed and calm. She carried a wreath of magnificent black hair.

Grimshaw had noticed her on the very first night. That is to

say she had arrested his attention.

"You are alone, sir?"

"Yes."

"Are you staying more than a night?"

"A month perhaps."

She had placed him at a little table in a far corner by one of the windows, one of the tables that she reserved for the elect. Richard Grimshaw was not a man to be given any sort of occasional corner. She had known that at once. She knew as much about men as a woman could know, placing them instantly in their respective categories of nice fools, mere fools, and nasty fools. She despised men in the mass, but she knew her gentleman when she saw him, and Grimshaw was more than a gentleman.

He arrested her attention just as she arrested his. She was aware of him without appearing to be aware of anything but a room full of people. She showed him the same calm, impersonal courtesy, and he, looking up into her clear pale face with its deep dark eyes set well apart, wondered a little.

"A damned fine woman"—that was the average man's inward comment, but Grimshaw's impression of her was both more simple and more subtle. He had spent his life in watching birds and animals, untarnished creatures of the wilds, and this tall woman with her dignity and her wreath of sombre hair had the flexible and calm beauty of a leopardess. She had physical perfection—but how much else had she? He began to watch.

Her dignity was her most striking quality. It seemed strange in such a place and among such people. She served like a high priestess, impassive yet gentle, blind to all that she did not wish to see, but Grimshaw guessed that she saw everything. She knew human nature, and yet did not despise it. She might think of men as fools, but as fool boys to be smiled at with wise indulgence.

"Woman," was the word that described her to Grimshaw, just "woman," lacking any superfluous adjective, a woman with noble hair and breasts, standing out above a crowd of little wenches with their little heads stuffed into little hats, and as like as peas—inside and out.

His attitude to her was supremely natural but unusual. It was instinctive. Whenever he entered the dining-room he gave her a

slight bow, and she — standing tall and calm — would give him a faint smile and an inclination of the head. They met and acknowledged each other like natural aristocrats, with a dignity that often characterizes people of the wilds.

"Good morning."

"Good morning, sir."

"What have you — for breakfast?"

"The usual things, sir."

He touched in her a sense of humour, slightly ironical, concealed, like wholesome inward laughter.

The usual things for the usual people.

He looked up and into her eyes that were steady but unbold.

"Porridge."

"Porridge, sir."

"Bacon and eggs."

"Bacon and eggs, sir."

She smiled suddenly.

"It seems as strange to you, sir, as it does to me."

"The same people and the same eggs and bacon?"

She placed a vase of fresh roses on the table.

"Like clothes, sir, habits are like clothes. You don't take sugar with your porridge, sir."

"No; thank you."

On successive evenings he watched her deal with various sorts of men: a fat and ruddy fellow who smiled up at her with bulging eyes and a gleam of artificial teeth; a young buck over from Plymouth who attempted to call her "Bessie," a polished person with an eye-glass and wearing a dinner jacket. She was polite to them all, effacingly polite. She was like a fine statue. The male effervescence broke at her feet, seemingly unnoticed.

Grimshaw wondered. Was she supremely wise, or had she a life of her own? And then he caught himself up in the midst of his wonderings. What did it matter to him?

But it did matter, because she was woman, and he — a lonely man increasingly aware of his loneliness — wished to reverence woman. A man, who has lived much with nature and marvelled at her works, is made for reverence.

He noticed that when she came to his table her serene face lost

its austerity. She seemed to put off a mask. She was woman.

They would exchange a few words. Each was finding out about the other without the other fully realizing it.

"It has been a good day, sir."

"Splendid — on the moor."

"Either one loves it or fears it. Will you have thick or clear soup, sir?"

"Clear, please. I spent half the morning watching a pair of hawks."

"Do you ever watch sea-birds, sir?"

"Sometimes. Down at Mullion the gulls seemed to cry all day and night."

"Yes — at Mullion. I was born five miles from Mullion. We had a little farm near there."

His picture of her grew. He thought of her as a tall, long-legged, wild-haired girl living in one of those lonely little white places where the stone walls were all purple with foxgloves. He could see her running about the cliffs and among the bracken.

"Do you ever go back there?"

"Everybody is dead, sir."

That evening he noticed her hands. They were large and white and firm, clean and courageous hands. He noticed too that she wore no ring. He caught himself feeling pleased about the absence of a ring.

An evening or two later it was she who asked a question.

"Are you writing a book here, sir?"

He glanced at her quickly. How did she know that he wrote books?

"No — not quite quiet enough here. Do you get time to read books?"

"Sometimes, sir."

"Any favourites?"

"Mr. Galsworthy's. He is a great man, sir. He understands so many people — different people."

"That's true."

He was astonished. And yet why should she not appreciate a fine human document, she a fine and human woman? She knew what life and work were, yes, better than some little conservatory

creature could know it.

When she brought him his porridge next morning she stood beside the table, looking down at the white cloth.

"The quietest room in the hotel will be vacant to-night, sir. Old Mr. Crossby is going back to London. If you want a quiet room to write in."

"Thanks — I do — I suppose if I ask the manageress — she will let me have it?"

"Of course."

He was grateful to her.

"That's the great problem these days — peace, a quiet corner. Even on the moor ——"

"I know," she said. "Char-à-bancs, motor-bicycles! You have been used to great, silent spaces —— And to write books ——"

"Oh, I'm not always writing books, Miss Royle. I like my share of life. But the quiet corner to think in — that's the problem."

"It always is for a man," she said.

Grimshaw seemed to reflect. Then he said:

"I am looking about now for a little cabin, a centre of gravity. I want it high up, with a view of the sea — and yet sheltered. Do you happen to know of a possible place?"

"I don't think that there is anything in Tawbridge, sir. Should you want it all the year?"

"No; I travel a good deal, but not as much as I did. I am beginning to hanker for a little cove where you can beach your boat."

She understood him and his needs as instinctively as he had understood her dignity, and if she had waited years for such a man she knew him when chance brought him to her.

Grimshaw was less sure, but he did not doubt as a snob doubts. He walked twenty miles that day, and lay on a round barrow under the blue tent of the sky, and saw all the moor and the sea spread out before him. He meditated.

"Rather late in life to choose such a mate. I am forty-nine, and I suppose she is about eight-and-twenty. A woman of the people. No; just woman. What would she want? Rooms on a sea-front, a band, two deck chairs, and twice a week — the pictures. Bright clothes. And I ——? I should correspond to a youth with no hat, his hair in a mop, the collar of his tennis shirt flopping over the

collar of his coat. Rather dirty flannel trousers, and perhaps — black boots!"

He felt the spaces of sea and sky and moor, and knew himself to be lonely, and more than lonely. He wanted to take root on a hilltop.

"Well, risk it. All life is taking risks. Rooms on a sea-front — and a band! Be thorough."

Grimshaw bought a little second-hand car at a local garage, and in two days he had learnt to drive it, and Elizabeth Royle — thinking of him as a man of the forests and the mountains — wondered at his purchase. Perhaps he had bought it to carry him in search of his upland cabin and the quiet cove where he could beach his boat?

The car had a double purpose. He disclosed it when he knew himself master of the machine. He came in late for dinner, and he was the last to finish, sitting solitary in his corner. Elizabeth was busy at her silver table; the two other girls were out of the room.

Grimshaw called to her.

"Miss Royle ——"

"Yes, sir."

She came and stood by his table. He looked up at her gravely, this Elizabethan woman with her loyal eyes and stately head.

"I have a favour to ask you."

She was silent.

"I am driving over to Widmouth one day. Would you come?"

They looked at each other.

For her — it was her crisis — her proving of the one man.

"I am free to-morrow afternoon, sir."

"Thank you. You will come? I am very glad. Shall we say half-past two? I will have the car at the door."

He saw something — a question — a pride expectant in her eyes.

"The hotel entrance, sir?"

"Of course."

She coloured. This was homage, the gesture of the man and the gentleman. She glowed. He had never seen her look as she looked now, gently proud, beneficent, happy.

"I shall be ready, Mr. Grimshaw. Thank you."

She went to her room, and sat down at the little table upon which

her mirror stood. She rested her chin on her hands and looked and looked. She was exultant, tender.

"To him — I give — everything — if he wishes it."

She dreamed awhile. She smiled. How differently he had come to her. How differently other men would have done it. A surreptitious smirk in a corner. "I say — Bessie, come out for a drive. I'll pick you up on the Widmouth road — what. How will that suit you?" The tactful, surreptitious cad! And she was going to walk down the steps of the Cressfield Arms like a gentlewoman, under the eyes of her own world, and step into his car. She would do it. He should have no cause to feel ashamed of her.

He had not. He was standing beside the car, holding a rug. The hall was full of people; Thompson the porter was at the door. She came down the steps, deliberate and self-composed, dressed very simply in black. Her face had a proud but gentle radiance.

Grimshaw raised his hat to her. She was woman. And in her way she was unique.

"Punctual."

"Yes."

There was all her heart in the quiet smile she gave him, that bright and deep glance of the eyes. He held the door open for her; he spread the rug over her knees. There were people who stared, but no one who sniggered.

Grimshaw took his seat beside her.

"You'll trust my driving?"

"I trust it," she said.

They reached Widmouth about half-past three. Grimshaw garaged the car, and they had tea at a tea-shop, and then sat on the sands. Widmouth was becoming popular. It advertised itself on posters, all black and blue and green about an aggressive and very blue-eyed child menacing the world with a wooden spade. It had begun to collect its waste paper and banana skins and young women with sun scorched and scaly necks, and a concert party and beach huts. In a little while it would have a lawn tennis tournament all to itself.

Grimshaw and Elizabeth Royle watched the pale-faced people from the towns.

"Quite a bright place — these days. I remember it when it was little but a fishing village."

"Yes," said she, "just where people worked and lived."

He threw desultory stones into the sea. They had not said much to each other; it did not seem to matter.

"I'm forty-nine."

He tossed the statement at her much as he tossed one of the stones. He glanced at her face. She was gazing at the horizon.

"Forty-nine — but I don't feel it. I have lived my life out in the open. I am as fit as ever I was."

Her voice had a quality of repose when she answered him.

"I had never thought about it."

"That's unusual."

"Is it? You are just — man — not a man, any sort of man. There's a difference, sir."

"Don't call me 'sir'," he said; "or I shall have to call you 'madam'."

She smiled round at him.

"What would you call me?"

"Just — woman. What better thing could I call you than woman?"

"That would depend ——"

"On the way I looked at woman?"

"Yes," she said —"and on how she wanted you to look."

On the homeward way Grimshaw pulled up his car on the moor beside a pile of rocks rising grey above the green of the bracken. The view was superb. They got out and wandered a little way over the moor, gazing and saying nothing. Her face and eyes were very gentle.

"I'm on a hilltop to-day, Mr. Grimshaw," she said, "and you have put me there. I feel that I can see all over the world."

"How did I put you there?"

"You must know — I'm proud ——"

"My dear," he said — and was silent a moment.

They wandered back to the pile of rocks and sat there in the evening sunlight, she a little higher than the man, his left shoulder almost touching her knees. A greater serenity possessed them both. They were equals. Each had waited for the other — and this hilltop.

"Forty-nine! Is it too old for you, Elizabeth?"

She remained very still.

"Not — if you want me ——"

"I think I have wanted you for years, my dear. Some things come

late. Better that than too early. Will you marry me, Elizabeth."

"I will," she said, as though pledging herself before the sea and sky and the old stones of the moor.

At the Cressford Arms a somewhat fussy manageress, standing upon her dignity, and not appreciating the dignity of man and woman, admonished Mr. Grimshaw.

"It's not fair to me or to the hotel, sir. Heaven knows it is hard enough to manage girls these days. But turning their heads — and in public ——"

Grimshaw corrected her impressions.

"I am marrying Miss Royle. Perhaps she had better cease to be a member of your staff."

He saw the world's eyes in the round — and astonished eyes of the lady. Not caring much for the world's opinion, he yet was very much aware of what the world would say.

"Grimshaw's reached the old fool phase. Marrying a waitress from a country pub. A fine, upstanding wench — and supposed to be as good as gold. Poor beggar!"

Perhaps the world was right. Was he not challenging fatal incompatibilities and misunderstandings, subtle differences in self-expression, inevitable disharmonies? But he was as determined as a boy can be, a sensitive boy — who — inspired by some intuitive sureness — pushes on past the protests of his elders.

He had few relations, two or three cousins and an aged aunt. He left them unwarned, and yet — somehow the news reached them. He received a letter written in a neat clerical hand; it came from Cousin John, a country vicar.

"My dear Richard,

"I feel it to be my duty — etc. ——"

Grimshaw tore the letter up and burnt it, but some of its acid phrases stuck in his memory.

"The girl may be an excellent person, but how can you expect her to understand a cultured gentleman's point of view?"

"Is it fair to the girl — and at your age?"

"She is bound to grate upon your sensibilities."

Yes; it was possible that the Rev. John might be right, but not

so right as he imagined. Grimshaw was obstinate.

He and Elizabeth Royle were married quietly at Tawbridge church. It was August. Grimshaw had managed to engage rooms on the Regent Parade at Widmouth. It was a deliberate and a challenging gesture. She had accepted his choice without a murmur, and suffered him to plunge with her into the thick of the holiday crowd and to become a part of it. She did not ask for explanations. It is probable that she was more intuitively wise than he imagined, and that she let him point out the path, knowing that the time would come for her to pause and to point and to show him. She did a great deal of thinking, and her thinking was based on feeling. From the first she understood him utterly, but dissembled the completeness of her understanding.

Yes, let him give her Widmouth and all that Widmouth stood for. It was the most subtle of provings. There was wilfulness in it. She understood.

So they sat on the little green balcony attached to the white front of No. 3 Royal Parade, and bathed and sunned themselves, and listened to beach concerts, and went to the local cinema and sat among youths and girls, and listened to the gigglings and mock kisses smacked on the backs of hands when the picture grew sentimental.

They took a boat and sailed; they made excursions; they had every appearance of accepting Widmouth and its sea front and its people. They did not criticize it openly to each other, perhaps because they were so very satisfied with all that their own intimate life gave them.

But she smiled at him dearly in her thoughts.

"Are you bearing this for me? Is this — my measure? Are you afraid that I shall be afraid of reality? Do work — the companionship of her man bore such a woman as I am?"

She let it go on. She was feeling rich in body and soul. She watched for any signs of restlessness in him, the call of the wild, of his beloved birds, books, the open road. She had read his books, and found him in them the one man for whom she had waited, her great gentleman, the man who reverenced things.

She learnt to drive the car. Mornings came when she left him scribbling on the balcony, and went off alone in the car. She ex-

plored; she drove east and west; she searched; she found.

She came back one day to find him sitting on the balcony in an attitude of abstraction. He had not heard her enter the room. She stood at the open French window.

"I have found it," she said.

He turned sharply. She felt that in him that questioned her and himself, their linked lives, his manhood and her womanhood.

"What have you found, Bess?"

"Your quiet corner — your little cove."

He stood up. His eyes seemed to deepen. He spoke to her very gently.

"Then — Widmouth — this sort of place ——?"

"My dear," she said, and drew him in and kissed him, "are you Widmouth to me — or I to you? There are the real things for both of us. I know."

Next day they drove out in the car, going southwest along the coast until they came to Tavy Cross. Elizabeth descended here to collect a key from an old stone house next to the Bank. They drove on; they turned seawards down a lane and came suddenly upon a gentle hill lying at the head of a green valley.

There was a little old farmhouse here that had been bought and recovered and lived in by an artist, standing in the thick of a wind-blown orchard, with grey walls keeping back the moorland. Below lay the sea. A path went down to it. The wild hillsides were all bracken and scabious and golden rod.

Grimshaw looked at the sea, the hills, the house, and then at her. A board above the gate told him that the place was for sale, but for a moment he said nothing, but took the key from her, and entered the wild garden, and unlocked the door of this little, secret house. She stood beside him; she smiled.

"Am I Widmouth to you — or this?"

She could see that he was deeply moved. He walked into one of the empty rooms and stood at the window looking at the sunlight on the hills and the sea.

"You are this — and yet not this. I cannot let you be this, Bess. I did not marry you to bury you alive."

She came and stood beside him.

"What if I love it just as you do? Besides, this is not all the

world—but our secret corner when we need it, to come back to from our wanderings, to lie in the fern, and watch birds, and make books."

He looked at her steadily for a moment, and then raised his wife's hand and kissed it.

"Was ever woman so wonderful as you?"

The Man Who Came Back

SANGER PULLED UP HIS CAR BY THE THREE OLD LOMBARDY POPLARS, where the road began to loop its way down to the Nibas village.

In the spring of the year four years ago, and on just such a day as this, he had marched at the head of "B" Company down into Nibas village. Yes; four years ago and on just such a day as this, with the young poplar leaves all gold and the young wheat very green in the fields, he had marched with the brown battalion down into Nibas village where Marie lived.

Sanger climbed out of the car, and stood on the grass bank where the poplars grew. He stood there very still, leaning against the trunk of a tree, and wondering, as a man must wonder at the changelessness of certain things.

Nibas had not changed. It lay there in its green valley with its little red and white houses, and its church spire protruding from the tops of a grove of beech trees. The stream flickered. The old, red brick château seemed to float in the midst of a smother of apple blossom. Sanger remembered that immense old orchard, and the red brick walls, and the hedges of box, and the bluebells in the beechwoods.

But his eyes looked over and beyond Nibas towards the flank of a hill where the road began to climb again. There, a narrow, red brick house jutted up, its slate roof looking blue against the green of the hillside. It was the house where Marie had lived. And beside it he could distinguish the red roofs of the sheds and the cone of the kiln where Marie's father had baked his tiles and crocks and hollow bricks—Les Tuileries.

Sanger gazed at that house. He was so very conscious of the strangeness of the occasion, that he should be here after four years as a wandering Englishman in his car, looking down on this French village. And the fruit blossom was out, and the trees grow-

ing green, and in him there stirred a pang of pain. Why had he come? Why rouse up old memories?

Yet he knew that an importunate curiosity had possessed him, though a voice had said:

"Never go back."

An illusion died; people changed. Women got married. Nineteen-twenty-two was not nineteen-eighteen.

He remembered things. They were as vivid as the grass and the fruit blossom.

He had said:

"I will come back."

And he had never gone back. Circumstances had been too strong for him. There had been his wound, and his poverty, those bitter post-war days when the world had not wanted him. Would he ever forget those six months without a job? Other illusions had vanished. And then his job had come to him; he had fastened his teeth in to it; he could afford a small car and a three weeks' hunting up of the strange past. He could afford to marry, and he had not married. Somehow, none of those post-war girls had piqued him. They had seemed so young and bright and hard.

He returned to his car. But he did not start up the engine. He sat and dreamed. And the voice interrupted his dreams.

"Only fools come back."

He remembered the letters he had written to Marie, and those three letters she had sent him, grave, simple, quiet little letters. Yes; like her grey eyes. And then her letters had ceased. The silence had been unbroken, and it had lasted for nearly four years.

What had happened down there? Had Louis, her brother, returned? Did old Georges Cordonnier and his wife still sit by the stove? Gentle old people. And always their conversation had been of Louis the son:

"Yes; when Louis comes back — everything will be all right."

The work of the world would go on, tiles grow like leaves, the kilns belch smoke, the carts go in and out as of old.

As he sat there in his car, with the sunlight flickering through the poplar leaves, all the past came back to him with a vividness and a poignancy that were part of the Spring. The four years dwindled away. He knew that he had loved Marie Cordonnier as he

had loved no other woman, for to him she had been different from all other women. She had possessed that mystical something that had made her woman to his man, and perhaps that was why no other woman had been able to move him as she had done.

"You silly ass."

Yes; probably it was just the glamour of a memory, the romance of those strange and terrible days when men had lived in fear of the unknown, but Sanger started up the engine of his car and set her towards the village in the valley. His curiosity had become intensified, and to it had been added some other feeling.

He might call himself a silly ass, and assume that in all probability Marie was married and had children. Three years ago when her letters had ceased to arrive, he had supposed that some Frenchman had come back from the war, and that she had married the reality and forgotten the shadow.

His car passed along the red wall of the château, and the apple blossom was piled high above it. The broad street of Nibas opened before him, just as he had remembered it, quiet and empty, one half of it in the sunlight, the other in shadow. He saw the little "Place" with its pollarded limes, and the mayor's house, and the high gables of the inn, the Toison D'Or. Battalion Headquarters had had their mess at the Toison D'Or. Sanger turned his car into the "Place," and pulled up in front of the inn. They might be able to put him up there.

The people at the Toison D'Or had changed. A tall and sallow woman in black met him in the passage. He raised his hat to her.

"Good day, madame, I wish to stay here. Is it possible?"

She looked surprised, and he was thinking that his French had grown rather rusty.

"For how long, monsieur?"

"Oh, a night, or perhaps two nights."

She scrutinized him carefully.

"Monsieur will want meals?"

"Something quite simple, madame, like the war. You see, I was in Nibas during the war."

Her sallow face remained stark and unfriendly. She was a chilling person; she did not warm to the war and its memories.

"I will show monsieur a room."

"I have a car outside. Can I garage it?"

"There is a place in the stable."

She turned and led the way upstairs.

But no sooner had Sanger found himself established in Nibas than a strange shyness took possession of him. In those war days Nibas had seemed so English but now he realized it as a place that was wholly and acutely French. It was not the village he remembered. It would stare at him as a stranger, and its eyes might be none too friendly. It might not want to be reminded of the English and the war.

He had unpacked his suitcase, and spread his belongings about that French bedroom, with its wooden bedstead and bare floor, and its wooden cupboard and solitary hard chair. He sat on that chair by the window. He felt awkward and self-conscious and English. He realized that he was almost afraid to appear in the village street.

But this mood was absurd. He combated it. He told himself that he was going up the road to look at Les Tuileries. He might see Marie, and he might not. And why this fear of Marie?

The Cordonniers might have left the place, and even if he found them in that high and narrow red house, surely he could behave like a man of the world, and smile and offer a hand.

"Well, do you remember me?"

And supposing they had forgotten him? Would it matter? He would be just a stray Englishman, a ghost passing through, and he could pay his bill, get into his car, and disappear.

He went out. By the butcher's shop at the corner of the "Place" he turned to the left in the direction of the church. The towering beech trees were coming into leaf, and as he passed into their shade a sense of chilliness made itself felt. It was like walking up the nave of a cathedral, for the branches met high overhead.

Yes; Nibas made him feel strange; he could remember a moonlight night when he had walked up that avenue with Marie. He remembered the things that they had said to each other.

"Beloved, we march to-morrow."

"Is it to the trenches?"

"Yes."

She had shivered in the hollow of his arm, and he had kissed her pale hair.

"But I shall come back."

Between the trunks of the trees he saw a new red building down by the stream. It looked like a factory, and he thought how raw and ugly it was, and then forgot it. The road began to ascend, and he emerged into the sunlight, and there before him on the side of the hill he saw the house and the tile-works of the Cordonniers.

He paused. The house and the red-roofed sheds were just the same, and he was surprised. But why was he surprised? Had he expected to see the kiln belching smoke, and figures moving about, and carts coming and going? He laughed at himself, and went on. He told himself that he would go and look in at the window at which Marie had been accustomed to sit, wearing her black apron with the purple pansies on it, and her sewing in her lap. He remembered the way her hair used to shine, and how her grey eyes with their very large black pupils would look at him suddenly.

He went on. He passed "Old François'" cottage, and the door was shut. Old François had been a bit of a character, sitting at his bench repairing pots and pans and locks and cutlery. Often he had filled old François pipe, but for the moment old François did not concern him. His gaze was fixed upon the house of the Cordonniers.

He drew nearer and nearer. He saw Marie's window, and the window of the room in which he had been billeted, and the small garden full of straggling stocks and wallflowers, and the wooden fence. Why, it might have been yesterday. He glanced at the sheds and the yard, and they looked as deserted and as moribund as of old. It seemed strange.

And then, for a moment, his courage failed him. He stood hesitant by the gate.

"Go in, you ass," said a voice.

He passed through the gate. He wanted to go to the window where Marie had sat, but somehow he did not dare to. He went to the door and knocked, and stood there with his heart beating hard and fast.

No one came. He knocked again, and listened. Yes, someone was coming, and he got a smile ready, but when the door opened no smile arrived. He found himself looking up at a tall, frowsy man

whose eyes had a strange, sullen stare, but Sanger was not looking at the man's eyes.

For the face of the fellow was not a human face. It was a sort of mask with three holes in it, and no nose or chin.

Almost Sanger fell back. And then he found his voice, and became consicous of the man's eyes. He raised his hat.

"Good day, monsieur, does Monsieur Cordonnier still live here?"

There was silence, a kind of horror of silence, and then from that face emerged a sound that was not human. It was like the sound made by some animal. It was savage, menacing, unintelligible.

Sanger found a faint smile.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur — I ——"

And then, with a crash he had the door shut in his face, and he was left there feeling helpless, and strangely shocked. For he had had a *flair*.

This thing without a face was Louis, Marie's brother.

For the moment he did not know what to do, and then he remembered old François. No doubt the repairer of pots and pans could reveal to him all that had happened in the house of the Cordonniers. He had a feeling that tragic and unhappy things had happened there, and as he walked away he turned to look at the house. Yes; almost it had a sinister look, and its windows seemed to squint at him.

Sanger was within ten yards of the metal-worker's cottage when he was granted his first glimpse of Marie. Someone was coming up the road under the beech trees, a figure in black that passed from sunlight to shadow and from shadow to sunlight, and Sanger stood still.

It was Marie, the same Marie with her quiet, gliding walk, and her pale hair shining, and her black shawl over her shoulders. She seemed to glide like a ghost under those solemn trees, and yet the live man in him knew that Marie was alive, and never so much alive for him as now.

He was conscious of a trembling. He went suddenly to meet her. He took off his hat and walked bare-headed. He watched her face, and as she drew near to him the expression of her face surprised and shocked him. For it had no expression; it was like a light that had gone dim; the eyes had an emptiness, but behind their empti-

ness dwelt fear. She moved as though not quite conscious of her surroundings, of the sunlight and the green trees and the Spring.

She came nearer. She did not look at him; her eyes seemed fixed on that narrow red house up yonder; almost she had the air of walking in her sleep. And Sanger felt a cry rising to his lips — the cry of the lover who should waken her.

"Marie."

She stood still. Her grey eyes with their very large dark pupils came to rest upon his face. They were like two circles of shadow swimming in soft pallor. She stared. It was as though she had been confronted by some figure out of the past, poignant and strange and calamitous. Her lips trembled.

She was afraid, and her fear was like a cold hand laid over his heart.

"Marie. Have you forgotten me?"

Her lips moved, but no sound came from them. And suddenly her face seemed to quiver like broken light. She drew her shawl more tightly over her bosom; she seemed to flinch, to waver to one side. She made as though to hurry past him.

He was shocked. What did it mean? She knew him — oh, yes, she knew him, and too well. It was as though the live man had appeared to terrify her. He held out a hand.

"Marie — you remember. Won't you speak to me?"

She gave him one strange, tragic, silent look, and went past him up the road. She hurried; she seemed to sway slightly from side to side, and Sanger watched her.

He did not attempt to follow her. He felt dumb, bewildered, helpless. He saw her reach the house, and pass in through the gate, and disappear through the doorway. She had not looked back.

Sanger put on his hat.

"Good God! Why was she——?"

He could not finish the sentence. He felt inarticulate, in the presence of some mystery. And then his glance fell on old François' white cottage, and with a sense of inevitableness he walked towards it. There were things that he had to find out. He knocked at the door, and a man's voice said "*Entrez*."

He went in; he saw old François sitting on his stool and bending over the bench as of yore. His head looked whiter. His back was

towards Sanger, and he turned and peered under bushy eyebrows at his visitor. He continued to peer for several seconds as though he was unable to realize and to recognize the return of that English soldier.

"Monsieur François, do you remember the Captain Tommy?"

Suddenly old François got off his stool. He was more stiff in his movements, more bunched up, but a smile spread over his face.

"Thunder! — it is — you, monsieur."

"Yes, in the flesh."

"After four years."

"After four years."

They looked at each other, and there was a silence, and then Sanger brought out his tobacco pouch. He held it out to François.

"New pouch, but same tobacco. Time to fill pipes. *Voilà*."

They filled and lit their pipes, and old François, returning to his stool, pointed to a rush-bottomed chair.

"Seat yourself, monsieur."

He sucked his pipe, and under his white eyebrows his eyes were watchful and curious. He had an air of shaking his old head. Yes; here was a situation, a strange resurrection from the dead. He sat on his stool and blew smoke. When would the Englishman begin his questions?

"Four years have not changed you, Monsieur François."

The old man tapped his forehead.

"I have the *bon chance*."

"And Monsieur Cordonnier?"

"Dead, monsieur."

"Dead! And madame?"

"Dead, also, monsieur."

His sharp replies sounded laconic, like the blows of his hammer on a metal pot, but his white eyebrows twitched. He had his feelings. And how much did this Englishman know?

"Yes; they died within six months of each other."

"What was it?"

"Oh, the doctor called it this and that; but some people die, monsieur, because they do not wish to live."

"How? What do you mean? Speak simply; my French is not so good as it was."

François scratched his head, and then darted a shrewd look at his visitor.

"Has monsieur been up there to the house?"

"Yes."

"And monsieur——?"

"A man opened the door, a man with half a face."

"Yes; that was Louis. He came back from the war like that. It would have been better——"

He sat brooding on his stool, and Sanger waited. Old François was not to be hurried.

"He was not pleased to see you, monsieur?"

"He slammed the door in my face."

"That's Louis. He went to the war *bon garçon*, he came back a devil. Oh, well, with only half a face like that. But it killed the old people, monsieur."

"His disfigurement?"

"No, the change in him. He has the temper of a wild beast. Work — never. The business went to pot. And drink, monsieur, and affairs with the lowest drabs in the village whom he could buy for a few francs."

Sanger sat rigid. The words rose to his lips, but for a moment he could not utter them.

"What a tragedy! And Marie?"

The old man gave him another piercing look.

"Ah — Marie. I can only tell you, monsieur, that he has made her a slave. She works at the factory; she works at home. He takes her money and her labour. Pah! But Marie always had too much gentleness, too much soul. She gave in and gave in. It was pity, of course. And now he beats her."

Sanger started in his chair.

"Beats her! My god, but why doesn't she run away?"

"Some women are strange, monsieur. And perhaps she is afraid. And perhaps she has nowhere to run to."

Which was true, though how true it was Sanger did not realize until he had seen a little more of the life at the house of the Cordonniers. He saw it from outside, surreptitiously, like the forbidden lover, but he saw it with a growing anger.

The fellow, like a filthy black spider, seemed to have spun a

web in which the wings of youth and the petals of the apple blossoms were caught and held. He was one of the "better deads," but most brutally alive, a kind of post-war ogre living on the flesh of all that was beautiful and tender. The shell that had ruined his face had also made a horror of the man in him.

Sanger passed up through the beech avenue after dusk. The green valley had grown grey, the lights flickered here and there beyond the trees. He passed old François' cottage, and came to the end of the garden fence where a lilac tree was in bloom. He could smell it; it was the same lilac that had bloomed four years ago. He came to the gate.

There was a light burning in the lower room, the room that he had known as Marie's, and opening the gate very carefully, he slipped in and approached the window. He saw Marie seated at the table with her work-basket before her. She was sewing. The light played on her hair.

Also, she was alone, and Sanger, going close to the window, tapped softly on the glass.

The startled lift of her head expressed fear. She sat motionless, her hands in her lap, and for a moment her big eyes looked at him. She made no sign. Her face turned itself away from him, and she went on sewing; she went on sewing as though he were not there.

But Sanger was becoming the man of four years ago. Again he tapped on the window, and more appealingly. His lips shaped themselves to her name.

"Marie."

She raised her head; she was listening; she seemed rigid with fear, and suddenly she held up a warning hand.

Sanger ducked out of sight; he drew back down the path between the flower-beds until he was some three yards from the window. He pulled his hat down and turned up the collar of his coat to hide the whiteness of his collar. Then he straightened himself and looked in through the window. He saw Marie with her head bent over her work, and in the doorway stood that brother of hers silently watching her. His eyes were motionless. They made Sanger think of the eyes of an animal watching some other frightened creature that dared not attempt to escape.

Louis Cordonnier's glance raised itself to the window. He stared. It was as though he suspected the presence of some other man. Sanger saw him draw back, and realizing what might happen, he cleared the low fence into the road, and smothered himself into the hedge on the further side of it. He was breathing hard through pinched nostrils; he was the fighting man of four years ago, watching for his enemy.

He heard the door open. Louis Cordonnier came out, and walking as far as the gate, stood listening. And Sanger's hand went instinctively to his side and felt for the butt of the weapon that had hung there in the old days.

"I could shoot the beast——"

And then he remembered. He stood there holding his breath, realizing that his hand had felt for the revolver at his belt. Extraordinary reaction! Just as at night, in some sap, when something suspicious was in the air, he had stood bristling, listening, his hand on the cold metal. Was he dreaming? He saw the figure at the gate turn about and walk back to the house. The door closed with a crash.

Again his glance went to the window. Marie's head showed bent over her work, and it seemed to Sanger that she was weeping.

After that he grew more cautious, for, from what old François told him, it was necessary to be cautious when dealing with Louis Cordonnier. The fellow was not quite human. Other people had tried to interfere, and their interference had brought more suffering upon Marie. Louis Cordonnier might have only half a face, but he could fight, and the village was afraid of him.

"Not by using your fists, monsieur, will you be doing any good. I am an old man, and I have learnt that violence helps no one. It will not help Marie."

Sanger nodded. Yes; probably old François was right, and he became again the lover of Marie Cordonnier, but a secret lover. It did not take him long to discover her comings and goings, and old François having satisfied himself that this Englishman was in earnest, joined himself to the conspiracy. "You can use my cottage, monsieur. Supposing I call her in as she passes? If Louis suspects——"

It was done. They met in the village, those two; they stood to-

gether for some moments in the porch of the church. Their hands trembled and touched.

"Marie. I must talk to you. I understand everything. Old François is our friend. Come to his cottage."

Her eyes were clouded.

"I dare not."

But she came, and they sat on two chairs, while old François stood outside the door, enjoying the sunlight and smoking his pipe, and watching to see that the brother was not on the prowl. Old François could hear the voices of Marie and her Englishman, and he smiled. Yes, Marie might say: "I dare not"; it was the man's business to dare.

Then came the evening when Sanger lit his pipe and looked at old François over the bowl of it.

"She will come to me to-morrow. She promises."

"Where, monsieur?"

"For a drive in my car. So you see!"

Old François blinked one eyelid.

"I should take her for a long drive, my boy."

"I shall take her as far as I can."

So, Marie, instead of going to the factory gate, wandered next morning past the "Place" of Nibas, and saw Sanger's grey car waiting there. She walked on into the sunlight and along by the red wall of the château, where the apple trees were like foam on the crest of a wave.

Meanwhile "Young Lochinvar" had paid his bill at the Toison D'Or and stowed his suitcase away in the dickey. He drove off down the road past the château, and into the flickering shade of the poplars where the stream ran in a world of green growth.

A little figure in black waited for him. He pulled up, and opened the door for her.

"Marie, the day is as good as your eyes."

She smiled, but it was the smile of a gentle fatalist.

"You will be sure to bring me back by five o'clock."

"Five o'clock."

"My brother will expect me."

He had no rug with him, but he tucked his raincoat round her. And so the day began, a day of strange, sweet sadness, and to

Marie her last day in a world of dreams. They drove up into the beech woods of Hauterive, and wandered and held hands and talked of the old days. Sanger had brought a picnic lunch with him, and they sat among the bluebells under a big beech tree and drank wine together.

The sun went west, and Sanger was bidden to look at his watch.

"I must not be late. He will be angry."

To himself Sanger was saying:

"Let him be angry for ever and ever."

But he drove her back as far as the Crucifix on the hill above the village, and there he stopped the car. He put an arm round her, for the fear had come back into her eyes.

"Is it to be the end, Marie?"

She nodded, and suddenly they clung together, and their kisses were passionate.

"Beloved, do not go."

"I must. It was a promise."

"But if he is cruel to you——"

"I promised—I promised those who are dead."

She wept, but presently she grew calm. She seemed to set her face and eyes toward sacrifice.

"Drive me a little way towards the village."

He looked at her, and smiled, but she did not see his smile. Her eyes were on Nibas. She seemed to sit there holding her breath, her hands clasped in her lap.

Sanger started up the engine. The road forked a little way below the Crucifix, and he knew that the left hand road would take him away from the village. It was the road by which he had come to Nibas, and up there on the hills it joined one of the great French highways that led both to Paris and the sea. He put on speed. The grey car was to play at destiny.

He took the left hand road, and he felt her hand clutch his arm.

"To the right. Stop."

But he did not stop. He put the grey car at the long hill, and the engine and the gears sang. Also, he put his left arm round Marie's shoulders.

"*Chérie*—I cannot stop the car. It is running away with us. It will run away for ever and ever."

She cried out:

"Oh, no, no, it is wrong! Take me to Nibas."

His arm held her more firmly.

"No, never again to Nibas."

She turned her head and looked up at him. She burst into tears, but presently something shone through the wetness of her lashes. She snuggled against him; she surrendered.

The Child

THEY MET ABROAD.

It was at Rome, in a little hotel on the Quirinal, where their tables happened to be side by side. Both of them were lonely and somewhat shy, and they talked "Rome and the marvels of Rome" with the formal seriousness of two people who shrank from displaying their inner selves in public. Each had come by a very sudden and vivid picture of the other.

She saw him as a rather silent and sorrowful man who had a queer way of looking at you as though he were asking himself questions about you. He struck her as being strangely mistrustful of life, unsure of things. They had hurt him and he was cautious.

To him she appeared as a girl of great sensitiveness, quiet, slightly aloof, taking the world and herself very seriously. He fell in love with her seriousness. It was of the gentle type, not declamatory nor urging a cause.

At the end of a week Sybil Grant knew a good deal about Walter Burford. His age was thirty-seven. He was a lawyer, a member of an old firm of solicitors in the city. He had overworked himself and had been advised to take two months rest and change. Two years ago he had divorced his wife; he had one child — a girl.

His gradual and shy frankness drew from her answering confidences, and he discovered beneath her seriousness an elusive and delightful sense of the values of life. Her mother had died a year ago, and she had cut herself adrift, and being alone in the world she had decided to allow herself six months of vagabondage before settling down to work.

"One must have a job," she told him; "something for which one feels responsible."

He agreed. His sad eyes appeared to be asking questions, and knowing that he was in love with her, she preferred his troubled intensity to the slangy ease of a younger and more modern man.

Some men were supposed to appeal to the mother in a woman, and she felt motherly towards Burford, though he appealed to her in other ways, as a virile man should.

When she decided to go to Florence he followed her there. Her flitting from Rome had been something of a lure and a challenge, and love answered it in the days of the spring. No cold wind blew from the Apennines; the sun lay rich and full upon marble of white and of rose; the fruit blossom was out; the Arno caught the blue of the sky.

It was in the Boboli gardens that he asked her to marry him.

"I am so much in love with you, dear, that I am almost afraid of my love. This — will matter so much."

She let herself touch his arm.

"I want it to matter. And perhaps — I understand."

"One shipwreck. It is your happiness and mine."

"I feel that neither you nor I can scuttle the ship."

"Ah — that's it," he said; "I wanted to feel sure. I — do — feel sure. If both shipmates have a sense of honour. My darling — we are going to be happy."

He held her arm.

"Of course. And Walter, I want to be a mother to Janet."

"Oh, you'll get on splendidly," he said, with what struck her at the time as being eager cheerfulness; "she's rather a queer kid, but she won't be able to resist you."

"Tell me about her. Why do you call her queer?"

"Mischief, that's all. She wants a mother."

"Walter — you are not marrying me — for the sake ——?"

"Good God! dear, no."

His voice had such intensity that the dear conviction thrilled in her.

"You don't think that?"

"No; I don't think it."

"Because — it would not be true. It is you and I, Sybil. That's what I want it to be."

They were married in Paris, and they spent their honeymoon there, and from the Hôtel du Louvre Burford wrote a letter to his child.

"Dear Jam,

"We are coming home next week, and I am bringing a dear woman to be a mother to my little girl. Her name is Sybil, and she is so looking forward to seeing you. I have told her that you call yourself 'Jam,' and she says she's sure that you must be strawberry. I have seen a lovely doll here, and she is coming with us to live with you.

"Your loving Daddie."

Burford had a house at Weyfleet, new and red, with imitation oak work in the gables, a thatched roof, little tricksy windows, and a loggia towards the garden. It was a June evening when these two arrived at the gate with a taxi piled high with their mutual luggage. Burford had explained the house, and had apologized for it.

"The place was good enough until I met you. We must look about, Sybil, and find something a little less modern."

"Does it matter?" she had asked him, with the happy look of a woman who is loved. "Does anything matter so long as we want the same things."

The house bore its name on the oak gate in letters of stamped copper. "Beech Lodge." Sybil had a glimpse of a stone-paved path advancing between clipped yews to a neo-Gothic porch, and standing in the porch was a child. She was very long in the leg and short in the skirt. She wore spectacles, and behind them a pair of hard blue eyes stared in the little red apple of her face. Her hair was the colour of tow.

If there had been any cloud-shadow across Sybil's horizon it had been the thought of this other woman's child, and she had tried to put the little shadow of dread away from her. Poor little Janet — Walter's child. She had made a warmth of heart ready for this meeting. She rushed at it, as though some crisis had to be met and conquered in the winning of Walter's child.

"Janet, my dear——"

"Hallo — Jam. Here we are."

It was the woman who advanced, the child who waited. Her blue eyes stared. She was decorous and self-composed and quite risky; she made no effort to meet the woman's advances, but she did not repulse them.

"How d'you do."

"May I kiss you?"

The blue eyes were hard and steady.

"If you want to."

"Of course I do."

She kissed the child, and as her lips touched the red cheek she was shocked by a curious association of impressions. Jam! Red currant jam, both acid and glutinous; a little red face, a certain sticky cunning, a tart smugness. There was something about the child that was infinitely repellent, something that she feared.

Sybil straightened, making herself laugh, and feeling breathless. She had an idea that her husband was watching her.

"What a lovely home you have got, Jam. We are going to be such friends."

The woman of seven outstared the woman of twenty-nine. She committed herself to nothing. She stood in the middle of the porch with her red knees and her red face, neither friendly nor hostile, but malevolently watchful. That was the horror of it, for Sybil sensed this watchful cunning though the child did not betray it. She felt that she was confronting something evil and old and cynical dressed up to look like a child.

"Now, Jam, old thing, are you going to keep us out of the house?"

Burford was uneasily boisterous, but the thing that frightened Sybil was the behaviour of the child. She saw the hard little face grow suddenly animated like the face of a woman of the world. She flung her arms round Burford's neck, hugged him, crooned.

"Oh — Daddy — I'm so glad you've come back. I do love you so."

"Why — that's real strawberry! Isn't it, Sybil?"

"Real strawberry," she echoed, conscious of a curious sense of nausea.

From that moment Sybil Burford set herself to fight and subdue her intuitive dismay. She made herself consider the naturalness of Janet's prejudices, the jealousy of a young thing, the selfishnesses of most young things. It was only to be expected that a strange woman, a woman who might exert authority, should be met with mistrust. After all, it had been the child's home before it had become her's.

A sister of Burford's had been looking after Janet and the house, and she left Weyfleet at the end of the week. Colourless and inarticulate she had accepted Sybil without betraying liking or dislike. Jam and her aunt had appeared to be excellent friends, perhaps because the strong child dominated the weak woman. Jam loved to dominate, and when Kitty Burford left she shed salt tears, tyrannical tears, with the obvious inference offered to Sybil.

During those first days Burford watched them both.

"You and Jam seem to be shaking down very well."

"Oh—I think so. I feel terribly responsible, Walter."

"You dear serious thing."

For the fact was that Jam was on her best behaviour before her father. She held butter unmelted in her mouth. She demonstrated on Sybil. She went to bed like a lamb with a "Mummy, will you come and hear me say my prayers?"

Sybil went to hear them said, while Burford wandered about his garden, smoking his pipe, and allowing himself to believe that his new world was the best of all possible worlds, and that his sordid memories could be forgotten. Man-like he wanted to escape from worry, home worries, and to be able to come back from his work to the smoothness of a happy and sensitive love, and to a child who had ceased to be a problem.

"Sybil has won her. I knew she would."

From the nursery window a voice was asking God to bless Daddy and Mummy and Bonzo the dog. Burford smiled. He wanted to be able to smile.

Sybil had heard Jam's "Amen," had kissed her and moved to the door, when some instinct made her turn and glance quickly over her shoulder, to see a sharp red tongue protruding.

"Jam!"

Her voice had a note of pain in it, and Jam, with a perfectly solemn face, withdrew the tongue and smirked at her.

"I always do that."

"To me?"

"No—to God."

"Jam!"

"Then God knows that I don't expect to get all I pray for."

So, the battle began between the woman and this child, a battle of

which Burford knew nothing, for neither of the combatants wished him to know of it. Sybil's pride had been challenged, and it kept its lips closed, and put its faith in patience and kindness. All her sensitive seriousness was involved in the affair, for she felt that she had her duty to Janet and her duty to Janet's father. How could she confess herself unfit to handle a child of seven years old?

There were many incidents, moments of defiance, of bold aggression, of pretended penitence. The child had a devil in her, and an amazingly sophisticated devil. She seemed to know things that no child should know.

There was the incident of Sybil's hat, a new and rather charming hat, in which Jam appeared, marching round the garden, mimicking her stepmother's walk.

"Jam, dear — you must not do that. Where did you find ——?"

Jam struck an attitude in front of the window.

"Oh — Walter — dear — isn't it sweet!"

"That is not funny. It's rude and silly. Give me the hat."

She stood at the window, trying to exert control, and not to lose her temper with the child. But Jam made a defiant face at her.

"Shan't."

"Jam, come here — at once, and give me that hat."

"Shan't. Silly old hat!"

She threw it on the grass, and proceeded to kick it across the lawn, and was joined by Bonzo who conceived the worrying of hats to be a game.

Sybil ran out and rescued it.

"I shall have to tell your father."

Instantly came the flash of the blue eyes and the stab of the retort.

"Sneak."

There was insolence in the child's stare. She had scored a hit and she knew it. "I'm too much for you," said the eyes; "so you must needs go and sneak about it." And Sybil understood much that was at the back of the child's mind.

"Jam, why is it you don't like me? Perhaps if I smacked you hard you would like me better."

"I won't be smacked by you. I'll bite."

For weeks this secret war went on, hidden away from Burford, who came home to find a smiling woman and a mellifluous child,

yet there were times when he was made to ask himself whether his wife was happy. He sensed in her a secret and nameless fear, for Sybil was afraid. She had begun to realize that her battle was more than a mere scuffle with a self-willed and vigorous child. It was a fight for her happiness with an extraordinarily malevolent and determined hatred, with a spirit of evil that amazed her, a cunning that caught her at every sort of disadvantage. She was a woman of sensitive ideals contending with a malicious imp. Moreover, she began to appreciate the fact that there was a horrible consistency in Jam's attack. In her little sly and savage way the child was out to wreck the woman's happiness. She was inexorable; nothing softened her, she despised softness, and the blue eyes were mocking and watchful.

Jam was developing a cult — the cult of the dear, impulsive child. She would fly out of the gate with Burford in the morning. She would meet him in the evening at the corner of the road, full of affectionate histrionics. It was "Daddy — dear" and "Daddy — darling." She was all over him. She would climb on his knees and hang on to his hand, and coo at Sybil with insolent sweetness. And the tragic part of it was that the man was fooled; he made himself respond to the music; Jam was budding wings, and Sybil had brought about the transformation.

She could not tell him. She could not bring herself to play the sneak, and confess her ignominious personal failure. It would sound so absurd to admit that a child of seven was poisoning her happiness and filling her life with little petty anguishes. She had begun to hate Janet with terrible yet suppressed bitterness, and hatred is an evil ferment in the life of a home.

She guessed that Jam was working to make her lose her temper, and to betray herself before Burford as a scolding, angry and ineffectual woman. She countered the attack by refusing to lose her temper or to suffer the ideal of herself to be eroded by the child's evil atmosphere.

"I won't be dragged down," she said to herself; "the little wretch shan't drag me down."

But the nastiness of the affair was beginning to have its effect on her, for Jam was sucking the vital goodness out of Sybil's soul. She had moods, she grew irritable and depressed; nor could she hide

the change from a man who continued to be her lover.

He remarked on it.

"You look a bit run down, dear one."

"Oh, I am quite all right."

"Sure?"

She guessed what was in his mind, and it confused her.

"No, Walter, nothing of that kind — not yet."

Burford was troubled. He remembered the beginnings of that other tragedy, how it had betrayed itself by a countenance of moodiness and of boredom, and he was assailed by the thought that Sybil might be bored. He was accused by it. Was he one of those impossible men who cloyed women into ennui and revolt? Could it be possible that Sybil was ceasing to care?

He hid the thought in his heart, tried to suppress it.

Meanwhile the child cajoled him. She was so innocent, a breath of the Golden Age!

"Why's Mummy so funny, Daddy?"

"Funny! What d'you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know. Just funny."

It happened one September — on a Saturday — that Jam put the tongue of poison into her father's heart. Sybil had a headache, and Burford and the child went off for a ramble through the pine woods, Jam full of leaps and skips and seemingly irresponsible chatter.

"Daddy why does that man come to see mother?"

Burford smothered a start of astonishment.

"What man?"

"The young man in the baggy knickerbockers, with the pretty curly hair. He always comes when you are away."

Burford pretended to laugh.

"Oh, that man, Mr. Dawner?"

"Yes, I believe that is his name, Daddy. And Mumsie goes and plays golf with him. It is rather nice for Mumsie to have such a pretty young man to play with."

"Of course it is."

"But you must not say I told you, Daddy. Mumsie might not be pleased."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. But I feel she wouldn't. Oh, look at this lovely

great fir cone!"

It did not occur to Burford that the child could be lying, and like a sensitive fool he did not go home and tell Sybil what he had heard. He brooded. He shut himself up in himself, an unhappy hater of his own suspicions, a man dominated by the memories of a previous tragedy, and beholding the vague figure of a dreadful ghost. He grew watchful, and detested himself for this watchfulness. He would look furtively at his wife, and wonder whether it could be possible that she was deceiving him. The very suspicion was like a poisoned wound.

One night he had to dine in town at some city function, and he came back late to find Sybil strangely tired and silent. She had had an exasperating day with Jam. She hid it, and Burford, acutely sensitive, felt the hiding of something. He was appalled.

Next morning Jam flaunted with him to the station.

"Mr. Dawner was here last night, Daddy."

"What!"

"I'd gone to bed, and I peeped out and saw him in the garden. Isn't it a joke!"

"An immense joke, Jam."

"We must keep up the joke, mustn't we? And some day we'll jump out and say 'Bo.' And won't we all laugh, Mumsie and Mr. Dawner and you and me!"

Burford went to town with hell in his heart.

Some days later he descended to dissimulation. He was going to dine at his London club with an old friend, and he let the fact be known some days ahead. He left Sybil sitting by the fire, and walked through the October twilight to the station, feeling like the murderer of his own happiness. He took his train to town, bought an evening paper at the bookstall and entered the next train that stopped at Weyfleet. He hated himself during all that journey, and he hated the motive that prompted it.

Arrived at his own gate he hesitated, facing the crisis. Was he going to find young Dawner lounging in there before his fire?

He let himself in with his latch-key, and went straight to the drawing-room.

Sybil was alone there before the fire engaged in darning his socks.

Her surprise was as genuine as her gladness.

"Why, dear man——!"

Her eyes were clear and gentle, beloved eyes, and as Burford looked into them Burford's lie died in his heart.

"I came back on purpose, Sybil."

"I'm so glad."

"There is something wrong in this house. What is it? Tell me."

She resumed her seat, and for the moment he saw nothing but her bowed head. Then her eyes lifted to meet his.

"Oh, I'm such a failure, Walter."

"Failure! How? Is it——"

"Don't you know?"

"Jam? But I thought——"

He looked confused, and seeing it she threw a cushion on the floor at her feet.

"Walter—why did you come back?"

"I was afraid."

"Of me, or for me?"

"Both."

His miserable face touched her.

"Dear man, I want to talk. Turn out the light and come and sit here. Yes, like that. I suppose I ought to have told you this before, but—I so loathed the idea of failure."

"But what do you mean?"

"It is the child. She is spoiling my life. She hates me with a quite incredible hatred. Yes—you don't know, it's horrible."

She bowed her head, and Burford, sitting at her feet, seized his wife's hands.

"But I thought——"

And then she told him, simply and without malice, of the humiliating struggle she had waged with his child. She hid nothing. She showed him the Jam he had not seen, the Jam of his absent hours, the little hard-eyed vixen who became a thing of ingenious hatred directly his back was turned.

"I did not tell you, Walter, because I thought I could win her in the end. I wanted to win her, for your sake, and I have failed."

He bowed his head over her hands.

"Forgive me, dear. Failed—no. It is I who have failed. I have been blind."

"There was nothing for you to see."

"Yes, but there was. And I should have known. Nor was I quite honest with you, Sybil — in the beginning."

She looked startled, troubled.

"Walter — you wanted me — for myself?"

"Oh, yes, yes. I wanted you so much that I did not tell you everything about the child. It was so hard to tell, and I felt that it told against myself."

"Tell me now."

He leaned against her knees and looked at the fire.

"The fact is — that child has always inspired me with hatred, shrinking. My own child — too. It seemed horrible, and I have fought it, but always it has been there. No. It was not because of her mother. It was there before all that happened."

She let her arms lie on his shoulders.

"How terrible for you, dear."

"It seemed so wrong, so damnably wrong. And then you came into my life, and I thought that you might be able to find the soul in her."

"I tried."

"Sybil, I believe there is no soul there, or if there is one it is the soul of a devil."

He was silent for a moment as though making some most solemn decision.

"The child will have to go. Deliberately she has tried to spoil our lives. She shall go."

"But can we let her go. We are responsible."

"I am very responsible, but I will not have her in the house. She shall go to some school, some particular school."

"But the holidays, Walter?"

He was inexorable.

"She shall spend them with my sister. I will not have her near us until some change has been worked in her, if any such change can be worked. I am responsible, and my responsibility means that she must suffer. Suffering is the better medicine, dear; without it we are mere brutes and horrible — selfish children."

She was troubled, dismayed.

"Oh, why did I fail? We have both failed, Walter."

He drew her head down on to his shoulder.

"I think we are too soft, too sensitive. She would beat us every time. Besides, my prejudices are too fierce just now. She needs strangers, some perfectly impartial atmosphere, people whom she cannot hurt."

Janet Burford went to the school that her father found for her, knowing that she had lost the battle, but the soul of the child was hard. She was full of excitement as to the school. It was a new world to conquer — full of other children to be impressed and bullied.

But St. Monica's was an exceptional school, because it had an exceptional woman at the head of it. It was a little world within a world, penetrated by the personality of Mary Gordon, that magnetic woman whom the girls adored. She was known among them as "The Beloved," but this woman of charm and wisdom could turn eyes of ice upon the vulgar, the insolent, and the self-assertive. The whole school followed her glances, and smiled when she smiled.

Jam made a dramatic entry. She asserted herself on the very first night.

She was confronted with Mary Gordon.

"You are a very ignorant and silly little thing. We must change all that."

The fight began, or rather — it was Jam who fought, for "The Beloved" and the school remained serene and detached and contemptuous. She foamed, to be given looks of indifference; she was ignored; no one ever troubled to call her a little beast. She was left chained up with her own hatefulness, and in a little while something in her realized that "The Beloved" was too strong for her.

She fell; she grovelled. She was under the spell of that woman whose eyes smiled at all the others, but who never smiled at her, and this little savage outcast crawled and whimpered for a smile. She alone was hated in the world of "The Beloved." She began to cry out to be loved.

Jam was away for two full years, and she saw her father twice a term. At first she shrank from him and was sullen, for his eyes were like the eyes of "The Beloved."

Then life changed. Smiles, a glimmer of good-will came into it;

contempt and indifference began to vanish, for love was chastening the child of hate.

One July, Jam came home. No one met her, for she had arrived by an earlier train, and she entered the familiar house and opened a familiar door.

Sybil was sitting on the sofa, and Jam had a glimpse of a small, yellow-haired boy, squatting on the floor, diligently thumping a footstool with a wooden spade.

The child, at the door, faltered. Then a sudden arm was stretched out to her.

"Jam, dear, I'm glad to see you back."

Jam's face crinkled; she burst into tears.

Paternity

HER FATHER WAS A LITTLE SNUFFY MAN, WHO, AFTER LIVING FOR fifteen years as a widower in the white house at the end of Prospect Terrace, had developed mannerisms and personal peculiarities that were neither criticized nor questioned.

"Mary — I'm waiting."

He called her peremptorily. At a quarter to eleven every Sunday morning he would stand on the dining-room hearthrug, holding his top hat and his cane and his gloves, waiting for his daughter to go to church. Always he said the same things, and said them at the same time and in the same way.

He had a habit of sniffing; also a long pinched nose with blue veins on it, a narrow forehead, a precise mouth. Every button of him was done up. When he walked up the aisle of the parish church he carried his top hat in his right hand and just as high as his shoulder. He joined in all the responses. During the sermon he sat bolt upright and as stiff as a back-board, sniffing rhythmically, and on his face an expression of alert scepticism, as though he were waiting to catch the preacher tripping.

His hobby was catching people out. He was the sort of person who when he read a novel, scattered question marks and scrawls in pencil here and there, and if he found a mistake in the grammar he wrote to the author about it. He addressed frequent letters to *The Times*. He was fond of sending anonymous postcards to prominent people with whose views he disagreed.

"SIR,

"I beg to suggest that your opinions are dangerous and fallacious. I beg to protest ——"

He was always protesting in his fussy, futile way; blowing his long nose like a trumpet, and sniffing his way through life towards an Evangelical elysium.

Mary was lame.

But her lameness was less an affliction than was her father, Mr. Frederick Fishenden, of 17 Prospect Terrace, Barham-on-Sea. Mr. Fishenden had been a civil servant, and had retired on a pension, and five thousands pounds or so invested in trustee stocks. He belonged to an age when Jehovah still sat at the head of the table, had his slippers fetched, and ate roast beef and Yorkshire pudding on Sundays, and would not allow — sir — that any female had any sex outside the marital bedroom.

Mary had an allowance of twenty pounds a year, out of which she had to pay for her postage and her travelling expenses, such as they were. She was plain, pleasantly plain, and romance in its conventional form had not entered her life. Her father, neither in his person nor in his opinions, encouraged romance. Any young man hesitating outside the green door of No. 17 Prospect Terrace, and meeting that little old cocksparrow of a man, might well have turned tail and sought adventure elsewhere.

Mary was useful to her father. She ran the house and kept the books, and was expected to darn his socks, and every Saturday evening she had to produce her weekly accounts.

"The books, my dear."

His audit was a solemn business. He sat in a cane-backed chair, jigging a foot and sniffing, and checking each item.

"Four bloaters on Tuesday. How's that?"

"Two in the kitchen, father."

Usually he queried the amount of milk consumed. He was very touchy upon the matter of milk. He would say that he was convinced that those two wenches belowstairs washed their faces in it.

"I abhor waste, my dear."

And every week she had to convince him that the maids did not use milk for their ablutions.

He was not only a tiresome and pompous little person, he was also a most tempestuous tyrant. Mary was allowed a little room of her own on the first floor at the back of the house. It had a high window looking out upon the narrow garden shut in by brick walls, and at the far end stood a stable. The stable was covered by a vine that sometimes ripened a crop of small white grapes. An old pear tree grew in the garden, and in the spring it was a smother of white,

and in the autumn a pillar of fire. Mary loved the pear tree. Her father was always threatening to have it cut down, not because it perpetrated any definite offence, but because he liked to interfere with things and to exercise his authority.

Mary's room was supposed to be a work-room. It was. She dealt with the mending there. Also she had an old, flat-topped desk by the window, and the desk had drawers, and one of the drawers could be locked. She kept the key of it in her pocket, for in those flouncy days women had pockets. The locked drawer was her one secret in that dull, Victorian little house.

Mary's secret was that she wrote. She had scribbled for years. As a child she had spun wonderful and impossible stories about princes and fairies and haunted castles, but now she did not write of impossible things. She had her moments of peace during the day when Mr. Fishenden was out of the house.

He took a walk from eleven o'clock till a quarter to one, marching out in his top hat with a cane tucked under his arm; he pottered up and down the parade, and met other quidnuncs, and set the world right. From two o'clock to three he slept on the sofa in the dining-room with a handkerchief over his face, and his hands crossed upon his tight little tummy. In spring and summer and autumn he took another little walk after tea, and then turned into the local Liberal club for half an hour. He did not smoke and he did not drink.

So Mary had her secret hours when she was supposed to be mending the house linen and meditating upon the complete rightness of her lot. She would wait for the closing of the green front door, and then get out her papers and sit herself down at the desk and escape in that other world. It was a wonderful world, quite beyond Mr. Frederick Fishenden's ken.

Mary was writing a novel. She had written other novels. She belonged to that unexpected world of the Brontës and the Eliots; ostensibly she knew nothing of life and yet the Mary who wrote, somehow knew everything. The world seemed to look in at her window. The pear tree was a tree of heaven.

But her father was as inquisitive as a meddlesome child. One evening when Mary had gone to a party at Dr. Hales — a musical party so called — Mr. Fishenden felt fussy. He went exploring. Once

a week he visited the gas meter, and poked his long nose into the linen cupboard, and on this particular evening he went rummaging in his daughter's room. He discovered the locked drawer in the desk. It annoyed him. He considered that nothing in his house should be locked against him. He tried his own bunch of keys on the drawer, but none of the keys would fit.

When Mary returned he was waiting for her. He had no qualms about asking the most impertinent of questions.

He said:

"I found a drawer locked in your desk. Why do you keep it locked? I expect to be told——"

Mary was very patient with her father. She had to be patient.

"It is my private drawer, father."

"Private!"

His tone implied that his daughter needed no privacies.

"I keep letters and photos and things there."

"Letters! What letters? You don't get any letters that are private."

He was so utterly outside her real world that sometimes she wondered at him, and was exasperated even while she wondered.

"All letters from friends are private."

"What friends?"

"Some of the girls I knew at school."

"Oh, girls' letters."

He sniffed. Such stuff could be passed over. And he remembered the gas meter.

"We have used too much gas this week. I expect those wenches have been keeping the jets flaring downstairs. You had better go down and look sometimes. Surprise them."

She stood observing him, seeing him all round as she saw the characters in her novel. He expected her to be a sort of domestic sneak.

"The days are getting shorter. They have to use more gas."

He snapped at her:

"Don't argue, my dear; see to it."

But he had not discovered her novel. It was beyond the capacity of his little, narrow, flat-backed head to conceive the wildness of his daughter perpetrating a novel. On the whole he did not approve of novels, anything after Scott and Dickens. George Eliot he con-

sidered a monstrosity; women shouldn't do such things. He had read Trollope. Stevenson was in the air, but Mr. Fishenden thought Stevenson thin, flimsy stuff. The fellow's style was histrionic. Scott and Dickens had produced novels; the moderns perpetrated fiction.

One day in the spring of the year when the pear tree was in blossom Mary did up a very neat parcel. It was the manuscript of her novel, "Martin Hume," and the manuscript was as neat as the parcel, for Mary wrote a beautiful, flowing hand. She was tempting adventure. Other and earlier novels had been relegated to an old sugar-box in the attic where they lay concealed under piles of "Sunday at Home," and missionary journals, but "Martin Hume" was different, a grown man created by a woman who had genius.

The parcel was addressed to Messrs. Lovell & Burnside, publishers, of Covent Garden, London, and Mary had chosen a time when her father was out in order to slip out and launch her parcel.

But as luck would have it she met her father at the corner of Prospect Terrace, just by the white portico of the Royal Hotel, and he stopped and pointed with his stick.

"What's that? — what's that?"

Her tolerant and wise grey eyes concealed amusement. She was feeling very much in blossom like the pear tree.

"Patterns, father."

"Patterns! Patterns for what?"

"New curtains."

"Where? We don't want any new curtains."

"My bedroom. I thought of buying them myself."

"Nonsense. New curtains. The old ones are not worn out, are they?"

She smiled at him.

"Evolution is life. Everything should change once in five years, even curtains," and she walked on and past him, leaving him with a puzzled and disapproving look on his face. Evolution! Abominable word, smelling of Huxley and Darwin. Mr. Fishenden was a Liberal, but his Liberalism was progress according to Fishenden. What nonsense women talked! As if a man's opinions and his personality were like lace curtains to be taken down and washed, or changed according to the fashion.

Meanwhile, Mary limped up the High Street of Barham-on-Sea

to the post office, which still persisted in living in a white, bow-fronted building which was altogether charming. It belonged to the Barham of Nelson and William IV, when gentlemen wore coats of blue and of bottle green and used the English language vigorously, and had not become too sensitive about sex and the benighted heathen and wenches who wore white stockings. Mary had her parcel registered. She came out with a slight flush upon her pleasant plain, wise face. She went and sat on a seat near the flagstaff on the cliffs and watched the shipping and the clouds coming up over the sea.

Messrs. Lovell & Burnside were a firm with traditions and courtesy. They acknowledged the receipt of Mary's novel, but not on a postcard, so that Mr. Fishenden was none the wiser when he scrutinized the envelope. He had all the letters that came placed beside his plate on the breakfast table, and if there happened to be one for his daughter he doled it out to her.

"Who's that from?"

"The pattern people, I think."

She had had to wear such a mask while living with Mr. Fishenden that she was able to conceal her excitement. She carried the letter upstairs with her to her room, and opened and read it, but was ready to hide it away should the little god of No. 17 contemplate interference. The letter acknowledged the receipt of the manuscript of her novel, and informed her that the novel was in the hands of Messrs. Lovell & Burnside's reader.

Three weeks passed. The pear tree had dropped its blossom and had put on a coat of shining green, and the vine on the stable was beginning to weave a pattern with gilded leaves. Every year Mary's father had the little front garden above the area decorously stuffed with red geraniums, lobelia, and white marguerites, and it so happened that this bedding scheme was in progress when a gentleman and a valise arrived in a cab at the Royal Hotel. The gentleman wore an eye-glass; he had a largeness and an air of importance, and a pair of observant and ironical eyes. The Royal Hotel received him debonairly, for obviously he was made to be received in such a way.

He questioned old Tom the head waiter, who invariably had a table-napkin over his left arm. It was said that old Tom would appear in heaven carrying it.

"Whereabouts is Prospect Terrace?"

"Just here, sir. Turn to the right when you get outside."

The gentleman had lunch and half a bottle of claret. He lit a cigar, and wandered out and about, and surveyed Prospect Terrace, and the green door and green balcony of No. 17. He was interested in No. 17, and in the whole atmosphere of Prospect Terrace. But he was in no hurry; he idled to the cliffs and sat down on a seat and finished his cigar, and realized Barham-on-Sea as being not all Prospect Terrace. It had the sea and the sky and the shipping, and a certain, quiet, catholic flavour. It had produced a famous sea-dog, and now it had produced something else.

It was about a quarter to three when the gentleman strolled back to Prospect Terrace. Mr. Fishenden had emerged somewhat prematurely from his white handkerchief and his slumber in order to stand on the doorstep and overlook the activities of the jobbing gardener who was filling the front garden with pelargoniums. Mr. Fishenden knew nothing about gardening, but he flattered himself that he did know all that was to be known about jobbing gardeners.

So the gentleman with the eye-glass met Mary's father on the doorstep of No. 17 Prospect Terrace, and they observed each other. Mr. Fishenden detested monocles; they produced in his Liberal opinions and prejudices the redness of an extreme Radicalism.

The gentleman with the monocle raised his hat to Mr. Fishenden. It was a gesture.

"Excuse me, I believe Miss Fishenden lives here."

Paterfamilias stared. His little, waspish plume of sandy-grey hair seemed to erect itself.

He said:

"I'm Mr. Fishenden."

Obviously he considered the announcement to be final and sufficient. And who was this fellow with the glass eye and his air of damned self-assurance who was asking for Mary? Paterfamilias bristled.

Said the man with the monocle:

"My name's Burnside. I have come down from town to see Miss Fishenden."

Possibly, Mr. Burnside considered that the information would act as an "Open Sesame," but he did not know Mr. Fishenden or the

amount that Mary's father did not know. Anyway, this little cock-sparrow of a man remained on the doorstep, with his hands in the pockets of his tight trousers, and his Pickwickian tummy stuck out.

"My daughter's busy."

Mr. Burnside began to appreciate his curmudgeon.

"Is that so. When will she be at liberty to see me?"

"When I choose, I think, sir. What's your business?"

"My business is with your daughter, Mr. Fishenden."

Mr. Fishenden was nonplussed. Who — the devil — was this fellow, a flash bagman, a super-tout? Or was it possible that the fellow was matrimonially inclined, and that Mary had been concealing some romance?

He said:

"My daughter does not see strangers, sir, without my knowledge and permission."

Mr. Burnside began to smile.

"I think I told you that my name is Burnside."

"It might be Smith, sir, or Jones, or Robinson."

"It is neither Smith, nor Jones, nor Robinson. I belong to the firm of Lovell & Burnside."

Mr. Fishenden had a lapse. He remembered the hypothetical new curtains, and the parcel of patterns. But then — the eye-glass?

"Ah, you've come about the curtains?"

Mr. Burnside's monocle twinkled.

"Not exactly. We are a firm of publishers. Possibly, you may have seen our name. It has been known for some seventy years."

Mr. Fishenden was both surprised and annoyed.

"Ha, of course. I do know the name. But I fail to see — what my daughter —— We get our books from the local library."

"I dare say you do, sir. But I have come down from town to see your daughter about a book."

"What book, sir?"

"Her book."

"My daughter's book? I fail to understand you, sir."

"The book, Mr. Fishenden, written by your daughter, and sent to us about a month ago."

For the moment Mr. Fishenden's prim little mouth hung open. He looked rather like a fish with sandy-grey spines on its head.

"A book, sir! My daughter — written a book! I have nothing to do with it."

Said Mr. Burnside sardonically:

"I don't suppose you have."

But, obviously, something had to be done about it; even Mr. Fishenden realized the inevitableness of the situation. Incensed and astonished he might be. His daughter and a book! Incredible! And she had said nothing about it; she had maintained a most undaughterly silence; she had not even availed herself of his acumen as a critic. Incredible! Most unwomanly! And the member of an eminent firm of publishers standing on his doorstep!

But the book! What sort of trash? A novel — of course.

He moistened his lips. He became aware of the jobbing gardener kneeling there doing nothing, listening, with a trowel, and a flowerpot idle in his hands. Wasting Mr. Fishenden's time.

He said:

"What is this book? A novel?"

"Yes, a novel, sir."

"Fiction. Of course. May I say, sir, that my daughter never asked my permission ——"

"Is that so? You surprise me. Possibly you will be surprised, Mr. Fishenden."

"Probably not, sir. Sentimental trash, sir, probably, sir. How could my daughter ——?"

"I admit — the miracle. No doubt — from your point of view ——"

Mr. Fishenden's face seemed to narrow to an edge. Was this fellow being ironical? Was he poking fun at an ex-member of Her Majesty's Civil Service? Confound him!

He said:

"You had better come in, sir. We will discuss the matter in my dining-room."

Mr. Burnside grew more bland in response to Mr. Fishenden's pomposity.

"Really, you must excuse me, but I have come to discuss the matter with your daughter. It is her book, Mr. Fishenden."

"Granted, sir. I have had nothing to do with it."

"Let me assure you that I do not hold you responsible. My opinion of the book is — that it is a piece of genius."

"Genius, sir?"

"Yes, genius. Believe me, I absolve you from all responsibility."

Mr. Fishenden became to feel quite sure that this publisher fellow was indulging in irony, and Mr. Fishenden did not approve of irony save when he used it himself heavily and with emphasis.

He said:

"You'd better come in," and he let Burnside into the hall, and going to the foot of the stairs, shouted peremptorily: "Mary, Mary, come downstairs at once."

She came. She was aware of a stranger standing in the hall, who was gazing with an air of ironic joy at the back of her father's head. His monocled glance raised itself to her. He looked at her with curiosity, interest. He held his hat in his left hand.

"Miss Mary Fishenden, I presume?"

"Yes."

He held out a hand.

"My name is Burnside. I have come down to see you about 'Martin Hume.' May I congratulate you on that book?"

She coloured up, and her grey eyes looked coy.

"You are Mr. Burnside, the publisher?"

"I am."

"I'm very glad."

And then she became aware of her father posed in the dining-room doorway rather like a dog who had sat up to beg and was not being noticed. He sniffed. She knew from his expression that he was about to exert authority.

"Mr. Burnside, am I to understand that you have come to interview my daughter on business?"

Burnside looked first at Mary, and then at her father.

"I may say — pleasure and business. We should like to publish Miss Fishenden's book."

Her father raised a hand as though he were signalling to traffic and ordering it to abate its pace or to stop.

"One moment, sir, I have not seen this book; I expect to read this book before I allow it to be published."

He tightened his tummy. He was the little, paternal censor guarding the morals and the autocracies of Prospect Terrace. And Mr. Burnside fixed him with his monocle and looked amused.

"Indeed! But, surely sir, you have read some of your daughter's work?"

"Never."

He turned an accusing glance upon his daughter.

"Scribbling in secret. Must be ashamed of it. I won't allow my daughter to rush into print without my — approval."

"I can assure you, sir, there is no need for alarm. Besides, I think it is Miss Fishenden's authority that we need. If she says — 'Publish,' we publish. It is a question of terms. I am here to discuss terms."

His ironic and friendly monocle glimmered at Mary.

"Do you say — 'Publish,' Miss Fishenden, provided we agree ——?"

She stood on the last step, and ignored her father.

"Of course, publish, Mr. Burnside. Would you care to come up to my study and discuss details."

She turned and climbed the stairs, and Burnside followed her, carrying his hat with a certain jauntiness. He expected paterfamilias to protest, but he had a glimpse of Mr. Fishenden left on one leg, with his face screwed up, and most illiberally inarticulate.

Closing the door of Mary's study he gave her a little bow and a quizzical look.

"Remarkable man, your father, Miss Fishenden, nearly as remarkable as your book."

Messrs. Lovell & Burnside were men of business, but on this occasion Mary and her book appeared to appeal to other worldliness. Mr. Burnside had come down to Barham-on-Sea with the idea of proposing to buy Mary's book outright, but instead of doing so he advised her to accept a royalty agreement. Mr. Fishenden had performed one service. He had made of Burnside a cavalier and a partizan, and had pushed authoress and publisher into a conspiracy of understanding.

"I suppose you are of legal age, Miss Fishenden?"

"Yes, I'm twenty-nine."

So. Mr. Burnside departed, and Mary met her father at tea, and poured out his tea for him, and he was portentously solemn. He had received a shock; he did not like to confess it even to himself, but his daughter was different; it is possible that he was just a little shy and afraid of her. He asked her no more questions about the book,

or about Mr. Burnside, or the terms of publication. He cultivated an official and departmental silence.

Actually this silence continued for three months. Life went on much as before, though Mr. Fishenden was a little less peremptory, and his daughter more a person.

A week before the publication of "Martin Hume" she came down to tea and presented her father with a copy of the book.

"Perhaps you would like to read it."

Mr. Fishenden read "Martin Hume." He sat up till eleven o'clock reading it. He was astonished, shocked, and a little bewildered. He could not understand how a daughter of his could have written such a book. Things happened in it which were not supposed to happen in a respectable, English household. And the language in places! And the hero was nothing less than an infidel!

The little authoritative soul of Mary's father gibbered and protested. And yet, in a sense, the book overwhelmed him; it was beyond and over and around him; it had the bewildering bigness of a strange city in which Mr. Fishenden's conventions and opinions were lost. He wanted to shout at the book, to write an official letter beginning with a peremptory and protesting — "Sir."

At breakfast, Mary found "Martin Hume" lying beside her plate. Her father's face wore the expression it assumed just before going to church.

She poured out his tea for him. There was silence. The presence of "Martin Hume" was ignored.

She knew that her father did not approve.

She had not expected him to approve.

And yet, three years later, when Mary had a little house of her own in town, and had visited America, and was very much a figure in the great world, Mr. Fishenden was walking up and down the parade of Barham-on-Sea with his top hat more at an angle, and looking more of a cock-sparrow than ever. He had assimilated and digested his daughter's fame. He had pinned it in his buttonhole. He wore it, too, as he wore his trousers.

He had the air of assuming himself to be a celebrity.

"Yes. That's Frederick Fishenden — the father of Mary Fishenden. Very exceptional man, obviously, to have produced such a daughter."

Obviously.

The Strange Case of Sybil Carberry

I

PEOPLE WHO KNEW IGNATIUS CARBERRY'S BUSINESS BETTER THAN their own had agreed to call him an amiable old fool.

Old indeed he was, in his seventy-seventh year, and he had to be pushed about the Vine Court garden in a wheeled chair, but his deep-set eyes, bright as a bird's, were not the eyes of a fool. He had a face of extraordinary happiness, a luminous face.

"God forgive us our uglinesses!"

That was his particular prayer, and to some people it had been a source of offence; for to insinuate that your neighbours are ugly is more unflattering than to call them sinful. And old Carberry's whole life had been a protest against ugliness, human ugliness.

"An obsession."

Mrs. Soutar of "Scarlets" had always called it an obsession.

"Not complimentary to us, my dear! But to carry a prejudice to such absurd lengths! And then — there's the girl."

Someone, breaking in upon the conversation, had asserted that old Carberry had somehow succeeded in producing an attractive daughter.

"The girl's beautiful. One can't deny it."

"I don't deny it. Jeremy sees to that. But for a man to give up his whole life to beauty ——! Rather selfish and impracticable, don't you think?"

"Well, my dear, he has produced two beautiful things, Vine Court and Sybil. And I rather agree with your son."

Mrs. Soutar had nothing to say against her son's taste. Jeremy was so full of life, such a superabundant and masterful young man,

and he was the one person on the earth whom Mrs. Soutar confessed that she could not manage. Jeremy managed his mother, and she clucked over it like a proud hen. Jeremy would manage Sybil when old Carberry went to his last rest.

"With his imagination — I can't think how he gets over that," she said; "the last ugliness — you know, a skeleton. Skeletons — are ugly. Seems to me death has the last word."

"Perhaps he means to be cremated?"

"I should call that shirking the issue."

It was October, and the little summer of the Gods lay upon the country, and Ignatius Carberry, propped up in his wheeled chair on the paved terrace above the moat and close to the sundial, saw both water and green grass. The water in the moat was very still, and lily leaves floated upon it.

To the right, through the squared opening in the yew hedge, Carberry saw a flagged path, statues, a great stretch of sward with fallen leaves scattered upon it, purple and red and gold. The great trees from which these leaves had fallen, oaks, beeches, limes and planes, stood spaced beyond the grass, and the sunlight playing through them was like a net of gold through which the falling leaves trickled. In the distance a low cloud of purple and blue and lilac showed between the trunks, asters in an immense herbaceous border.

Old Carberry looked from the fallen leaves into the yellow eyes of the spaniel lying at his feet.

"Boggis has learnt not to meddle."

The spaniel blinked.

"Meddlesome gardeners are the devil."

Yes; Boggis the head gardener had learnt his lesson or as much of it as mattered to the gentle autocrat in the chair. Not to fuss, not to be fulsomely tidy, not to sweep away the crisped beauty of the autumn leaves until Mr. Carberry's eyes had blessed them, and the worms had had their share. Boggis might go about saying: "He — likes it like that." Ignatius Carberry knew that to nine hundred and ninety nine people out of a thousand a man is no more than "He."

The spaniel arose and sat on the stump of a tail. He crinkled his nose. The woman creature — also Thomas the black cat — were

approaching along the paved path between the statues.

Carberry's face seemed to grow more luminous.

"I have given her beauty," he thought, "beauty within and without. It has been worth it."

And then, Ignatius Carberry looked at his daughter as a man sometimes looks at that stranger — himself. He saw the great dark eyes set well apart, eyes that had the quality of deep and partly-shaded water, the broad, low forehead with the very black hair smoothed over it, the short and sensitive nose, and that most expressive mouth. She was not too tall, and she had the long, straight legs of a boy. Moreover, she was as beautiful in movement as she was in shape, a light, drifting thing, deliberate, sinuous.

"Surely, surely," he thought, "souls must differ as bodies differ. Those people made of butcher's meat, with hocks and buttocks! And she — she looks no heavier than a blown leaf, and she moves like one."

Aloud he said:

"Who taught you to wear amber in October?"

He was a tease, and she came and kissed him, not cloyingly like the sentimental and devoted daughter, but like one spirit bending over a fellow spirit that is greatly loved.

"Well, you."

"Oh, no, Pixie."

"The leaves — there, and Tom's eyes, and Pedro's dear, silly old eyes, too. You woossy woossy thing ——"

She bent over the spaniel and cuddled his soft floppy head, while the black cat jumped upon Carberry's knees, and with one black paw on the man's chest, deftly and with solemnity placed the other paw upon Ignatius's nose.

"Salaams, Thomas."

He caressed the cat whose amber eyes gazed into his luminous old face with a kind of grave ecstasy.

"Mrs. Soutar been?"

"No," said the girl, straightening herself with one quick graceful movement; "I'm rather glad."

"One's neighbours, my dear!"

"Yes, I know. But on a day like this ——"

"Pedro and Thomas, and the falling leaves, and the smell of

Boggis's autumn fire! Matter is alive to-day."

She seated herself on the stone coping of the balustrade above the moat and looked down at the still water. They had a language of their own, these two, and silences that were lucid. For to both of them beauty was but a mysterious veil, a shimmering mystery hanging like a moonlit mist over the realities divined behind the veil.

Carberry looked at his daughter.

"You," he thought, "you beautiful, ethereal thing! How did you arrive? How did you grow up? And what will life give you when I am gone? Jeremy? Good Lord, that hot and molten young man! And yet——"

She turned suddenly, and looked at him with a kind of steady shyness as though she knew what was in his mind.

"I suppose we are eccentric people?"

"Oh, very," he answered, with that little droll smile of his; "in fact we are not quite real. I have given you a most shameful education, my dear."

Her voice trailed a deliberate note.

"Real. We! Yes. As real as those leaves. But then — how unreal — most people are. Why are some things so convincing — music and a beautiful tree, and a tulip, and Pedro's eyes? They are right in me — and I in them. But people are all — words."

Carberry was stroking the cat's back.

"I think some of us are getting beyond words," he said; "we shall know things without naming them. We shall not need the common coin of language. Thomas and I understand each other, and Thomas has no words."

II

THE morrow brought Jeremy. He arrived with suddenness from somewhere in Asia where he had been climbing mountains, and Sybil had read all about his climbings in *The Times*. There was nothing secret about Jeremy, for when anything spectacular happened in Jeremy's life it always got into the papers, and Mrs. Soutar would cluck over it.

The sun had gone. A wind was blowing October to tatters, and the leaves were racing each other over the grass or piling themselves in bronze gold reefs. There was a touch of north in the wind, and

old Carberry was St. Ignatius-sit-by-the-Fire with his two tables of books and papers about him, and the hearthrug littered. Sybil had gone forth to gather flowers. She was working her way through the long border among the asters and the chrysanthemums when she felt an alien presence.

Yes, Jeremy was there on the grass, with his hands in his pockets. He looked sandier and ruddier and stronger than ever, all high cheek-bones and audacious blue eyes. For cheekiness and self-assurance his school had known no boy like him. "Cocky Soutar," they had called him, and Cocky Soutar he had remained.

"Gratters," said he.

She should have blushed, for the heat of him was obvious, but Sybil's mental flushes showed themselves more in her eyes than in her skin.

"Amber — by Jove! The Lady of the Mums!"

She came out of the border, looking at him slantwise, and not smiling. His self-assurance was so immense that she was afraid of it. That sandy hair, those high cheek-bones, and dominating blue eyes! Always, he made her feel that his blood was one degree hotter than the blood of ordinary men.

"How sudden you are."

"Oh, I flew half the way home, you know."

"One day you are on Ararat or somewhere ——"

"Quite so."

She smiled a little with her lips but not with her eyes, for she was on her defence with Jeremy. He had proposed to her three times, and each time with more assurance, an assurance that suggested the inevitable. That was the trouble with Jeremy. His vitality was so immense that it mesmerised people; she knew that he was going to do great things, not because he was great or original, but because he stamped himself upon the duller crowd like a glowing steel die upon lead. He would take the crowd by the collar and it would grovel and lick his boots. It would shout "yes" to him when it meant "no."

"You look fitter than ever."

Her eyes were without lustre. She had a moment of panic. Never before had she felt his presence to be so fiercely disturbing. He emitted fumes, physical vibrations. She, too, heard herself saying

"Yes" to him when she meant "no." In two months there would be that inevitable photograph in the papers, a church porch and fragments of a crowd, and Jeremy with his head of brass — and she — linked to him.

She was conscious of a sense of struggle.

"I must go in — Father ——"

"Wait a moment," he said.

He just stood in her way, and though the whole garden lay before her he seemed to fill it. She felt that there was no way round and past him. The sheaved flowers quivered in her arms.

"While I count ten ——"

"Oh, longer than that. I have been away six months. Didn't see a woman for three. Then, I fly half the way home. That's suggestive."

He smiled, and she pressed her face against the flowers.

"Always — you are in such a hurry."

"One has to be — these days. You have to be just five minutes ahead of the daily press. That means that you are going to get there."

"Where?"

Her eyes were wide open but very dark.

"To the top of Cotopaxi or Everest."

"But does it matter? I mean — one gets further — dreaming. Do come in."

He stood stock still, eyeing her confidently.

"You will have to come with me some day, Sybil. That's certain."

"You think so?"

"Sure of it. Fate. Now don't look scared."

"Scared! I'm not."

"Splendid. No, I'm not coming in again; I've seen your father. I only got home in time for lunch, and the mater is a bit exacting — on the first day. Come riding to-morrow. I'll call for you."

She made herself meet the challenge.

"Perhaps. What time?"

"I'll call for you at ten. Come along; see me as far as the bridge. I'm going back across the park."

She humoured him as far as the bridge across the moat, and even stood awhile to watch him cross it and start across the park. He had disturbed her, and that was his lot in life, to so disturb people that

they became weary and gave in to him. He was like a very strong and self-assertive child hammering a brass pot with a hoop-stick.

"Is this — sex?" she thought.

He turned by a big black sequoia and waved to her, but the gesture reminded her of the salute of an Italian fascist. A menace and a blessing mingled. She raised her sheaf of flowers.

"I won't marry you," she thought; "no, no, no. What is there in you that so disturbs me? A queer feeling——"

Soutar's determined figure disappeared, and her thoughts returned in a circle. She stood staring at the dark water with the blown autumn leaves floating upon it, remembering that Jeremy had seen her father, and that after such interviews Ignatius's white hair looked all blown about. Yes, like a spiritual aureole, disturbed by a physical storm. But what an absurd simile! And what was that in the water?

She stared. There seemed to be a leaping, tawny redness down there under the wind-ruffled surface, like the flames of a fire burning at the bottom of the moat.

Ridiculous!

And then she grew conscious of fear, a strange appealing terror. Something was happening, someone calling. A blaze, a redness——

She turned quickly and looked towards the house and again there was that tawny redness. Through the opening in the yews she could see the window of the library, and the window was lit up as she had seen a window lit up by the sunset — but there was no sunset. Also, the mullions showed black. The glare came from within.

Fire!

She ran. She was not conscious of movement, but only of a something reaching out to her, calling, while the soul of her rushed to meet it. She was still clasping the sheaf of flowers, crushing them against her body, but all that she saw was that reddened window.

III

ALL that portion of the room in front of the great open fire-place was blazing, and as she rushed forward she saw all the strange and terrifying detail of it, Ignatius helpless in his chair, like a martyr tied to a stake. His white hair was a yellow aureole. He seemed to be

brushing flames away with his hands. Both tables were ablaze, and all the litter on the hearthrug. A quill pen stood up in the inkpot with a little flame climbing its feathers. A magazine rising in a blazing curve twisted upon itself like a body in anguish. A rug was smoking, and one of the curtains had an edge on fire.

She rushed in, grasped the chair, and drew it backwards — the burning rug following it, caught by the castors. She bent down and tore the rug away. She was not conscious of pain; neither she nor her father had uttered a word. His clothes were smouldering. She darted for a Bokhara rug, and smothered him with it, while before her the room still blazed.

Someone rushed in, screaming.

"Help! Thomson! Oh, Miss Sybil!"

Sybil's face was like ivory.

"Help me; pull the chair ——"

They were dragging it towards the door when other helpers came pouring in. The under-maid, Elsie, a little, fragile thing, showed more wit than all the rest. A gardener was pulling at the blazing curtain. Elsie flashed out, to return with the red fire-extinguisher that stood under a table in a corner of the hall. What was more, she seemed to know how to use it. The hissing stream smothered the flames, and in a minute there was nothing left of the blaze but wisps of smoke and vapour, and an acid scent, the charred tables and the sheaves of blackened paper.

Old Carberry's chair had come to rest in the hall between the great black *armoire* and the refectory table. The Bokhara rug lay across his knees, brilliant with colours that were dimly reflected in the polished panels of the cupboard. He was in pain, but he was able to give his daughter that droll, long-lipped smile.

"Seems that I am a new sort of Phœnix."

She had sent a man on a bicycle to Spellford for Vinson, their doctor.

Solicitous and wild-eyed, she was bending over him.

"Are you burnt — much?"

"Oh, a little."

"I won't touch you till Vinson comes. Something to drink — brandy? No? Thank God — I saw."

She stood back from him suddenly, with a movement of the hand

across the eyes, a puzzled, bothered gesture.

"Jeremy had been with you."

"He had."

"And when he had gone—you were angry. You had the paper on your knees. You threw it down; it was scorched, a brown patch, and then it blazed up."

Astonished, he looked up at her.

"Yes; it happened like that. But how do you know——?"

"I don't know how I know. But it happened like that?"

"Exactly."

She moved to the window and stood looking out into the dusk of the garden. She saw the black outlines of the trees, the grass ribbed with swathes of autumn leaves, the cold grey sky. Her eyes dilated, for another scene was superimposed upon the actual scene before her like a transparency, and as though her vision were double, focusing both the seen and the unseen.

She passed a hand across her eyes.

"What has happened to me?" she thought. "Carter on his bicycle in Spellford street. He gets off and leans his bicycle against the railings. He goes up to Dr. Vinson's door. A maid—and then Dr. Vinson himself. Am I dreaming, or can I see what I wish to see—two miles away? Or is it just the burning suspense—lighting up some queer super-sense?"

She turned quickly towards her father's chair.

"Yes, I'll get it, a glass of water."

He looked at her queerly. He wanted water; he had been about to ask her for water. But how did she know——?

IV

IN SPITE of an optimistic doctor, and burns that were less serious than had been feared, Ignatius Carberry died in the night, with his daughter sitting beside him and confronting a double mystery. He had slipped peacefully from life to death, without a struggle, one of his bandaged hands resting in hers.

And she had known that he was going to die—though how she knew it she could not say—and now that he lay dead, she sat at the window listening to the breathing of the wind. She was stricken

— and she was afraid. She had lost the one friend to whom she could speak, and to whom she could tell things without the fear of meeting a mechanical and superior smile.

She had left her father's face uncovered, and often during the tragic night she would turn in her chair and look at it, and it seemed to her that it was faintly luminous. The great riddle lay upon her her heart, and interlocked with it was the fear of the strange thing that had happened. This flash of lucidity — that seeing without eyes, that hearing without ears! What did it mean?

She wanted to speak of it to someone, and especially to the friend who lay dead. He would have listened and he would have understood, though he might not have been able to explain the workings of her superconsciousness, for both of them had known how much there is that is unexplainable.

She could imagine that wise smile of his, and his gentle and slightly ironical manner.

"When you can't explain a thing you coin a word. Cryptesthesia, my dear. It happens, and you have had a rather bad attack of it."

She rose and went and stood by the bed.

"Oh, I am alone," was her cry. "Where are you? The you in you must be near. All this beauty — this subtle understanding? Was it nothing? No more than a filament that breaks — and the light goes out? We believed that there was more."

She looked awhile at the still face, and then went back to her chair by the window. There was a great stillness everywhere save for the sounds made by the wind, and as the hours passed a kind of languor descended upon her. She felt calmed, as though a healing hand had touched her brain. The shock of that disturbing blaze of other vision passed. A gentle sadness followed, peace, a tender looking backwards.

"He was very happy here," she thought.

She understood too that he had wished her to be happy, and that he had created all this sheltering beauty for her as well as for himself.

"I — too — will be happy here," she declared, "the beauty that he created shall be my beauty."

She met the grey, autumnal dawn with calm eyes, and with an equal calmness she went to meet all the day's necessities. The servants were surprised at her calmness. Her dignity was a thing of

quiet movements, and of a voice that was deliberate and sad.

Dr. Vinson had come and gone. He was a kind soul, quiet, practical.

"I will see to things for you."

She had letters to write and she sat down and wrote them at the oak bureau in her bedroom. Pedro the dog was lying upon his master's bed. The house was very quiet.

A maid knocked at her door.

"Mr. Soutar, Miss Sybil. He wishes——"

She turned her head and answered calmly.

"I am seeing no one, Kate. Thank him——"

The woman went away and returned.

"Mr. Soutar wishes to know, Miss, whether he can do anything for you?"

"Nothing, Kate—thank you."

She resumed the writing of her letters. She felt tranquil, undisturbed by any supernormal vision. Even the vital figure of Jeremy was blurred and indistinct, passing out of her consciousness like the shadow of some unimportant thing. She wrote steadily, pausing at times to look out into the garden, that world where she and Ignatius Carberry had lived so much of their lives together. The trees and the grass and the rustling, scudding leaves soothed her, for this beauty was more comforting to her than any human presence. It remained; it was alive; she felt that she would be able to feel him in it.

All through the following days this soft, sad calmness remained with her. Ignatius Carberry lay in Spellford churchyard; people had come and gone, and one kind voice had said to her:

"My dear, you cannot live on here alone."

She had answered quickly:

"Of course I can, it is what I want and need."

She felt weary, and unwilling to listen to human voices, and for some time after her father's death she felt that life was dim—like a landscape blurred by rain. A merciful apathy lay upon her.

People, too, were somewhat dim, shadows, unreal, but the trees and the two animals and the garden sleeping its winter sleep were very real. The dimness of other humans vaguely surprised her; even Jeremy had remained mercifully dim, a molten figure hidden

from her by a haze. She had been aware of him at the funeral, and of something challenging in his blue eyes, but she had refused to see him when he had called at Vine Court.

"Please tell Mr. Soutar that I am seeing no one."

Jeremy had gone away. He was lecturing in London to the Geographers and the Travellers, with much "I" in his discourse, a man who for once had taken his mother's advice.

"Let her alone for a while, Jerry."

Mrs. Soutar clucked wisely, though her wisdom did not travel to the top of the mountain. She had no subtlety. Sex did not express itself to her as a raw thing, horribly meddlesome and disturbing, a muddy ditch in which most people wallow and in which even the feet of the angels are apt to stick.

The winter passed gently, and the life at Vine Court went on much as before, with Sybil busy in the garden as she had been in her father's day. Old Boggis and the two under-gardeners ventured on some innovations and were reproved. She had a great love for a weed fire, and an old blue paint pot out of which she daubed the seats and timber a soft — ethereal blue. She weeded the lawns, and kept her solitude with Pedro and the cat, sitting down at night to her piano, or staring at the fire and feeling for that other presence.

She was sad, but sad with tranquillity. She had had no more shocks of lucidity, of spiritual vision, and she had begun to believe that her normality had settled like calm water after that one strange uprush of the unexplainable subconscious. She saw only what her eyes meant her to see, and heard all that her ears could catch of the day's sound vibrations.

"It was very strange," she thought. "I suppose it was premonition — and the shock of the moment. It does happen. We get beyond, or above, our normal selves. And I was afraid. Perhaps the veil of the flesh is merciful."

It seemed to her that it would not happen again. She had had six quiet, dreaming months; and, like the winter garden, she was sleeping till the Spring.

V

THAT year Sybil Carberry became more than ever absorbed in her

world of flowers, for to her they were beautiful, sexless things, though she was wise as to their sex. The grass under the great trees had blazed with crocuses, and daffodils had swung their heads in the wind. The lilacs showed a powdering of green. Then, when the hyacinths in the long bed beside the great beamed pergola were calling to the first adventurous bees, the wind veered to the north and snow came.

She stood beside old Boggis on the paved path and looked at the bent flowers draggling their colours on the soil. The snow had gone, and a round sun threw shadow patterns upon the stones.

"I've given up cussin' the weather," said old Boggis philosophr cally; "if God likes to see flowers flattened out—I guess that's His affair."

She told Boggis to bring her an armful of hazel twigs and a sack stuffed with straw, and kneeling on the stuffed sack she began her rescuing of the bowed heads, taking each flower and gently propping it with a forked twig. The flowers gave her their perfume as her ministering hands played among the whites the blues and crimsons, the soft pinks and ultramarines. She was happy in her work of rescue.

So intent was she that she did not hear a man walk across the grass. He stood, leaning against one of the stone pillars of the pergola, watching her, and his eyes were hotter than he knew. She felt the heat of them, and turning quickly upon her knees. looked up.

"I hope the flowers appreciate it——"

He smiled down at her with the young male's brazen beneficence, but very quickly his smile died away.

For she was kneeling there, staring at him with wide and wondering eyes, eyes in which there was a kind of horror and astonishment.

He had his back to the sun, and about him she saw a red glare, a fringe as of fire, and his whole body was coloured by it. Even his eyes had a redness. Her impulse was to shade her face with her hands.

"Jeremy——!"

Her face shocked him.

"My dear girl——!"

She rose slowly and drew back until her feet were among the flowers, crushing them. And some terror had returned, that most terrible lucidity like a glare of light playing upon the very inwardness of men and things. And this man was the colour of blood. She felt the vibrations of his sex, of lustful sex that waited to seize and crush the flavour of her beauty.

"Please — go away ——"

He reddened, dumbfounded, crudely conscious of her horror.

"What on earth's the matter ——?"

She drooped before him, hands hanging limp.

"Please — go away. You are all red."

He stood and stared. He was angry, because he understood so much and so little. Red. What the devil did she mean? Looking at him as though he had come to her after rolling in a muck heap! His hot and turgid egotism flared.

"What's the matter with you, Sybil? I have kept away all these months. I know what happened, after I had seen your father — but you wouldn't let me ——"

She trembled.

"Oh, it's not that. You don't understand. You couldn't understand. I — myself — can hardly understand it. The shock. It makes me see things ——"

"See things!"

"Yes; what ordinary eyes do not see."

He gave an angry laugh.

"I might be a headless and gory ghost. Is that the sort of thing ——?"

"I see — you."

He felt that he had every right to take brutal offence.

"I say, this is rather preposterous, isn't it? You are a nice sort of young woman for a fellow — to ——"

Her voice broke in.

"Jeremy — I can't help it — I can't help what I see. It's some strange power in me ——"

"The person you ought to see — my dear — is a doctor. Look here ——"

She raised her eyes to his, eyes that both shrank and pleaded.

"It must sound like madness — to you. I know. But please go

away. You — you hurt me."

For a moment he was tempted to play the imperious and dominant male, but then, with a peculiar and tragic calmness, she looked him full in the face and spoke words that to him were amazing in their frankness——"

"No, Jeremy, you think I am to be overpowered, treated like an hysterical child. You were thinking — 'If I get her in my arms and kiss her — like a savage——' Yes — you were thinking that. I can't help it, but I can read you."

"Good Lord——!" was all that he could say to her.

For the first time in her life she saw him nakedly confounded, and actively resenting the experience.

"My dear, you must be a rather uncomfortable young woman."

"I tell you I can't help it, Jeremy. Please go."

He took her at her word. He walked back to "Scarlets," his brazen self still ringing with the blows that she had dealt it. All red, was he! And she could read his thoughts, and divine his emotions, and she had accused them of hurting her.

"Occult rot!" he declared. "The girl's off her head. Old Carberry was to blame, with his Swedenborgian stunts and his dabblings in spiritism. Well, absolutely insulting — I call it — to a normal man. She's not fit to be married."

His common sense was clamorous and angry. It was a preposterous situation; unwholesome; disconcerting. And all that he could say was: "The girl's abnormal," and he said it to himself with emphasis and solemnity, like a politician makes a grave statement in the face of a public meeting. He said it to his mother, standing all square with his back to the drawing-room fire.

"Someone ought to write to Sybil's relations. She ought not to be left there to stew in a lot of spiritualist slush. I assure you — it was — really quite beastly. No, I'd rather not explain."

Mrs. Soutar was not a woman who tarried in halfway houses. You were either nice or not nice, sane or a mental case, and all that was not nicely normal was embarrassing, a matter for the doctors.

"I had better go and see her."

Her son frowned and lit a cigarette.

"Well, if you ask me, mater, I'd think twice about it. She'll tell you you are all blue or black or something, and that you cheat at

Bridge——"

"My dear Jeremy!"

"It's a fact. She told me—— Oh, well, let's leave it at that. But a sort of village Cassandra! You might write to somebody. I might see Vinson and put him wise. She wants watching."

"I think I'll write to the Gloucester Carberrys," said his mother. "After all—one has responsibilities."

She looked up at him with her head on one side.

"Don't you think so?"

"I'm damned if I know what to think," said the son.

VI

PEOPLE may be damned for thinking or for not thinking, but Sybil Carberry, knowing that her case was a strange one, was at pains to share its strangeness with no one. To Vinson, who called as a friend, but with the look of the observer in his eyes, she was frank without being too frank, knowing that like most good men grown grey in a profession he would find this strange new thing incredible.

Not that it was new, but in her case this supernormal window had opened more widely than it had for others. Her lucidity was exceptional, amazing. She saw the inner life of others as in a dream. She heard their thoughts as though they were spoken.

She recalled a favourite theory of her father's.

"Life is consciousness, and more and more consciousness, and perhaps other kinds of consciousness. One might prophesy that a time will come when the uttered word will be unnecessary. Soul will flash to soul. But, as yet, we are not ripe for so terrible and splendid a nakedness."

She had realized the terror of it. To have the souls of others naked and stripped before her consciousness. To be instantly aware of the unspoken thoughts, the physical impulses, the earthly passions.

What a consciousness! To be surrounded by living flames!

Yet, mercifully, this power of hers was only partial. To some people she did not react at all, and they remained the dumb and ordinary humans, unreadable save by the senses and her intuition. And the partial nature of her new consciousness astonished her,

and yet when she reasoned it out the thing seemed less astonishing, for she found that as yet the new language was very simple, and in its crude beginnings.

She got the elemental things, the stronger glare of the simpler passions. She understood when a fellow human was jealous, or angry, or lustful, or greedy, especially when these emotions concerned herself. The more subtle moods, the finer inflexions she did not get, but what she did get was sufficient to scare her into solitude.

For, obviously, certain presences would prove unbearable, and with them near it would be like living in a dust-storm or next to an erupting human volcano.

Manifestly, solitude was to be her lot, and in considering the beauty of her home she could call herself fortunate. Almost, it would seem as though Ignatius Carberry had forseen the problem of his child's clairvoyance and had prepared a sheltering world for her, for even in the house itself there was no offending presence. The servants were all old, with the exception of Elsie the undermaid; they were attached to Sybil and to Vine Court, and beauty refines and tranquillizes. There was no presence in the house to offend her. On the contrary, she was touched more than once by the simple goodness she divined. Nor was the situation without its humour, and Sybil had her pixie moods.

She discovered that a spirit of happy emulation existed between the two old women, Kate and Ellen. To them she was their child; they shared her, and their devotion had become nicely balanced.

If Ellen cooked her a dainty dish, it was Kate's part to place it before her as though she were offering her heart.

"There, Miss Sybil."

And Ellen had to be praised, though Ellen complained to her crony and fellow-devotee that Sybil's passion for fruit and green things and milk and bread rather cramped her style.

"I don't get a chance to do what I might do. Entrées and kickshaws. And good roast meat."

There was happiness for Sybil in the tranquil affection of these two old women.

"You two dear things," she would say to herself.

And sometimes she would play a pixie trick on one of them.

"Ellen, you are thinking that I should like asparagus——"

"Bless you, so I was! Now, how did you know that?"

"Somehow, you had the asparagus look in your eye, Ellen."

But the question of asparagus raised a problem in the garden. Old Boggis, as honest a soul as ever lived, stood with his hat pushed back, and scratching a round and pensive forehead.

"Someone's bin at them beds."

Someone had.

Lord and Santer the two under-gardeners were supposed to be unimpeachable men, but of the two Santer was the less unimpeachable. Lord was close on sixty, a quiet and inarticulate creature with a passion for cutting grass, and he tended the Vine Court lawns as though they were sacred carpets. Santer was thirty-three, a dark man with a voluble and dressy wife.

"I've come round after dark, and I've bin up early," said old Boggis, "but never a soul I've seen. Yet, last year some grapes was cut."

Theft in the Vine Court garden was sacrilege rather than an offence.

"Don't bother about it, Boggis."

"But I do bother, Miss."

That same afternoon Sybil came upon Santer putting out Phlox Drummondi and Nemesia in one of the borders. She was walking in the grass, and his back was towards her.

She noticed that Santer was rough with the plants; he did not handle them with love, but resentfully, as though they were someone else's plants.

Moreover, as she stood very still, watching him, she knew of a sudden that Santer was a thief, and no ordinary thief. Waves of evil-feeling and thinking seemed to spread from him as he crouched there, jabbing the plants into the soil, the suggestion of a snarl on his thin, dark face.

Sybil was shocked. It was as though she had discovered an ulcer in the smooth soft skin of the garden.

"Santer."

She had moral courage. She might hate exposing the meannesses of mean people, but she did it.

"Why did you take the asparagus?"

He swung round on his heels, still crouching, and his face was

malevolent, for Santer was a village politician, one of those who preach brotherly love with certain envious limitations.

"What d'yer mean?"

She knew that he was going to be insolent.

"You took it. I know. If you had asked me you could have had it as a gift."

And then he stood up with a black flare on his face, his right hand clutching the trowel.

"I'm not ashamed. I've a right to it. You and your money — I'll tell you a thing or two ——"

She was not afraid, for knowing so well when a thing was mean and evil, and being able to look in unmasked face of it, she knew her enemy and despised him.

"There is no need for you to tell me, Santer. I know."

Her calmness was an offence to his baser soul. He had been caught, and the one thing in has favour was that he did not cringe.

"You know, do you! What do the likes of you know of the likes of us? Why should you — parasites — have all the strawberries and cream? Yes, I took the damned stuff. Why shouldn't my woman have something of what you — ladies ——"

She turned away, and he extended a clawing hand.

"Now — you can have the law of me — you — as never did a day's work ——"

Her voice came back over her shoulder.

"You can go, Santer. Of course, I shall not prosecute you."

"Yah," he snarled, "you can afford to be magnam'mous, you can."

She sought out old Boggis and told him, and old Boggis was angry.

"I always did think that chap was slimy, Miss. But did you catch him ——?"

"I challenged him, Boggis, and he boasted about it."

"We'll boast him."

"No, no," she said; this is a garden. He shall have a month's money and go."

So Santer departed, and an aged but stout old man took his place, and peace reigned; and Sybil felt these kindly and human spirits round her. Human they were; they had their little piques and prides and frailties, but they were very harmless frailties, and in feeling

them Sybil realized that she loved to have them so. Likeable old children in whom the shimmering heat of life had been tempered to a gentle afterglow.

A year passed, and her strange and lucid peace continued, and during the whole of that year Sybil Carberry never went beyond the park gates. Sundry relatives, stimulated by Mrs. Soutar's pen, had come and seen and been serenely baffled. Sybil was the child of her father, only more so. Spellford and its purlieus had given her up. At the age of three-and-twenty she had chosen to live the life of an eccentric old maid, with a dog and a cat and a gardening apron. It was preposterous but it was true.

Of course she was queer. What could you expect from old Ignatius Carberry's daughter?

As Jeremy's mother put it:

"She makes me think of a wood spirit—you know, a sort of Dryad, all eyes and a white face looking at you for a moment from between green branches. She's uncanny. I'm sorry, but I can't get on with uncanny people. I like to know where I am."

VII

POSSIBLY the happiest people are those who know how to live alone, and that all our prattle about social responsibilities is so much fudge. The crowd kills. Even a disciplined crowd does its killing most efficiently when directed by the brain of some more solitary man, and in these days of futile haste and of swarming primitives solitude grows less and less.

Old Carberry had believed in solitude. His theory of the coming of a super-consciousness had demanded for the evolution of this consciousness an atmosphere of solitude. He had argued, too, that if you granted the materialists all that they claimed, the last word would be with the solitary man, some chemist perhaps or physicist who would be able to blow the earth to smithereens or poison whole continents.

But he had not thought sufficiently upon reaction, upon the eternal dualism, and it may be that he had not realized its necessity. He had gone his way, and had left his child and comrade in a little world of beautiful solitude that was permeated for a while

by a sense of his presence.

Sybil had her garden, her old people and her animals, and books, books both good and evil, and she found that evil books disturbed her like evil humans. She had to black-list many of the clever people, the self-conscious cynics, the criers of stinking fish. Carberry had loved few books, but he had loved them with understanding, but rarely had he deigned to touch the book of a man who lived and wrote in a city. He had said that too often such a man's work was tainted with Tottenham Court Road cleverness.

Wise and lovable old tyrant! Yet for Sybil, a crisis was foreshadowed when the awareness of her father's presence began to grow dim. How the change came about she did not know, or whether the change was in herself or in the atmosphere surrounding her consciousness. She felt that a something had gone, melting away slowly like a wraith or mist in a valley.

She discovered loneliness. It came upon her gradually as the other presence grew dim, but its very gradualness made her afraid, for there was stealth in it, inevitableness; it seemed to approach her like a grey and sinuous beast.

"I am alone," she thought, there is not a soul to whom I can tell things."

She shrank more and more into her solitude, and she grew more and more afraid.

Solitude — a beautiful solitude, and yet — it seemed to her to be dying, dying for her, because in spite of its beauty it could not give her self-expression.

She asked herself what she understood by self-expression. What did most women mean by it? Sex and its feathers? Yes, sex; but not the crude, physical sex from which she revolted, but the more subtle symbolism that was behind sex. Duality, the interaction of two contrasting yet comprehending spirits — love.

She stood by the moat, looking down at the still water, and the floating lilies.

"I'm incomplete," she thought.

Her eyes were afraid.

"Is it that I am the only one of my sort in the wide world, a kind of psychic monstrosity? Oh, horrors!"

The dusk gathered down, and feeling like a soul marooned on

a desert island she fell into a sudden panic. Why was she not like other humans, warmly solid and mercifully dressed in comfortable and normal consciousness? This horror of isolation! For she understood now that the ordinary human animal would shrink from her. She was uncanny; she was not like the rest of the pack.

Even those old servants — if they were to realize ——?

Would they stay with her?

Or would they compromise with the problem by voting her sweetly and harmlessly insane?

This panic mood made her remember a night-terror she had experienced as a child, of a dark place, a cave from which she was trying to escape, but the darkness had moved with her so that she had never gained the daylight. The child had given way to panic, but the woman resisted panic. She kept on reminding herself that the issue had to be faced and to be faced calmly. If this extraordinary power was hers, might there not be a reason for it?

But how would a calm attitude towards the problem help her loneliness, and make her feel less of a monstrosity?

It was very natural that she should recoil from her sense of abnormality, and of a sudden she found herself yearning to be an ordinary woman, and content with an ordinary woman's emotions. To be part of that more comfortable and less hyperconscious life.

"Oh, God! take it away from me?"

She wandered about Carberry's garden like a child, even recalling Mrs. Soutar's simile of a white-faced Dryad, a hunted spirit afraid of itself. In her solitude she would stand clasping the trunks of the old trees, and pressing her forehead against the bark. She hid herself in the deep, flowery seclusions, and once old Boggis caught sight of her kneeling in the little garden house as though in prayer.

She was praying:

"Oh — if there is any merciful Intelligence — beyond — let this thing pass from me. Let me be stupid, insensitive, one of the crowd."

Boggis was troubled, as were her other devoted servants. Her melancholy was growing so obvious, and they were struck by her look of yearning, almost of despair.

"Why don't she marry Mr. Jeremy?"

That was Boggis's solution. There was nothing wrong with Mr. Jeremy, so far as he could see.

"She's got the mopes. Livin' like an old lady, and at her age, and with her looks."

Kate and Ellen were not quite sure that they agreed with Mr. Boggis, but they understood that something was very wrong with their beloved one, and Boggis might be right.

"Mr. Jeremy hasn't been near her for nearly a year."

And suddenly it occurred to these good souls that this might be the reason of her unhappiness.

Disastrous hypothesis! Mr. Soutar was climbing other mountains, but at this most critical moment he descended from Olympus, and appeared to the smiling Kate, looking so very much the man of destiny to Kate who had always thought him such a handsome gentleman.

"Well —— I never — sir —— You'll excuse me ——"

"Is Miss Sybil at home?"

"She's somewhere in the garden, sir."

Jeremy looked at Kate with those all conquering blue eyes of his.

"Supposing — I go and find her?"

"Why not, sir."

Kate was an incurable romanticist.

Conversely Mr. Soutar was an incorrigible climber of mountains, and the mountain that defied him was the mountain to be climbed. His rebuff had lasted him a year, and the motive that had brought him to Vine Court was less generous than it might have been.

Unfortunately he came at a moment when Sybil was holding out her hands to some shadowy and imagined comrade, the desired partner of her dreams. She was crying out for a live and human presence, something that was simple and sensitive and clean. A lonely woman is in danger, for in flying from her own loneliness she may leap over a precipice.

"Jeremy!"

For the moment she was glad to see even Jeremy. She had emerged upon him from the lilac walk, a tangled place where the branches of lilac and syringa met, and in putting back one of those green curtains she saw Jeremy. He looked different — thinner, less

brazen. And to Jeremy she appeared as Mrs. Soutar's Dryad, a creature with big dark eyes looking out of the green shadows.

"Ha!" thought he, not quite so much of the Cassandra, my lady, what! You are just a little bit glad to see me."

He had his grudge; he was the sort of man who must crow on his mountain top when once he has climbed it.

"Well, how's the world, Sybil; your world?"

He was smiling, and she came to meet his smile. There was something in him that baffled her, she could not read it, for it seemed to her that this was a more impersonal Jeremy, kinder and less red. Moreover, she thought it was rather generous of him to come to Vine Court after all these months and the things she had said to him.

"Where have you been? Climbing mountains?"

"I'm always climbing mountains," he said. "How are you, Sybil?"

He was vague to her; but he was human, and in her loneliness she was glad of his presence.

"It was good of you to come."

Soutar was watching her. To him she was less of the mountain, and more of a creature that had bitten him a year ago, and who — to expiate the insult — should come to him humbly. Jeremy had the hot egoist's streak of cruelty.

"You think so," he said; "and so do I. Perhaps one of us has changed a little, Sybil."

Was he being ironical? Irony was the last thing that she asked for. Her dark eyes seemed to flicker.

"Of course — one changes."

She allowed him that much, and instantly he seized all that a man might assume that he had the right to seize. She was penitent; she had come to realize that men of his calibre were not to be picked out of gooseberry bushes. Moreover, she had retained her peculiar power to provoke the lover in him, and to make him feel that he wanted her as he had never wanted less obvious women.

"Yes, one changes," he said.

There was no doubt about his irony. She should make it up to him for the things that she had said a year ago — and her surrender should be complete. Rather a charming sensation, humiliating this pretty creature, and listening to her hurried breathing, while he

spoke to her sternly and felt the quivering of her beneath his mastery. She should give herself up; he would insist upon a little passionate and emotional crawling before he let himself go.

"Something to say to me, haven't you, Sybil?"

She stood looking at him, and suddenly she understood. Her hands went up to her face, for the shock of his coarse selfishness was like a blow.

"Oh — Jeremy ——!"

"Ah — I thought so ——"

He blazed, for to him her cry of anguish was nothing but a confused confession, her woman's tribute to his maleness.

"All red — am I?"

He caught her roughly as she stood there with her hands up — and for a moment he held her slim and rigid hand bewildered in his arms.

"Now then, you'll kiss me, and say that you are sorry ——"

She put her two hands against his face.

"You beast," she said.

Her strength — and her fierceness annoyed him. She twisted free, and recoiling from him, fell back into the smother of the green branches.

Soutar stood staring. His egotism might be a pretty brazen thing, but her eyes scorched it; for she was a soul, and he a mere blundering animal.

She made a movement, and one of the green boughs covered her body. She seemed to melt into the foliage until he could see nothing but her feet and knees and the white flare of her outraged face.

He tried to smile.

"Well, upon my word, of all ——"

She said nothing for the moment, but continued to look at him as though he had tried to stab her soul. Then he saw her lips move.

"Please go, Jeremy."

Surprised at himself he turned and walked away across the grass.

VIII

AT NIGHTFALL a mantle of silence seemed to fall upon the garden

and the park, and the eyes looked out into a great circle of darkness which gave to Sybil the feeling that she was surrounded by infinite space. There was not a light to be seen, nothing but the stars. Moreover the night was soundless, save for the movement of some wild creature, or the voice of the wind, or the tapping of a bough against some other bough. Solitude — and this absolute silence of great spaces.

On that night after Jeremy's second self-betrayal, the silence and the solitude and the darkness terrified her. She wandered about the garden, past the dim statues and under the old trees, feeling that she could not bear this solitude and this darkness.

They were so empty, and no one understood.

"Yet, if I had given myself to Jeremy," she thought, closed my soul's eyes and ears — I should still have felt the horror of him. I'm not like ordinary women. It hurts me."

She paused, leaning upon the balustrade of the bridge, and looking down at the water. She remembered how she had seen those flames in the water, but she saw nothing now — nothing but that dim and darkened mirror. She could not help thinking how easy it would be to die, only that she knew in her heart that death is not the end of things, and that life has a message, a sealed letter that must be opened, and that those who throw that message away unread may have to puzzle it out with suffering in the world of some other consciousness.

"I wonder if anyone would believe me——?"

Yes; if only she were believed — if this strange power of hers was of use, not an hysterical delusion to be scoffed at.

She felt that she would have to pour out her soul to someone or go mad.

Sybil was bending low over the balustrading when the black water of the moat changed for her. There was a blur of light, an iridescence, and then in that dark medium as in a crystal she saw a picture grow. It became vivid and distinct. She saw a man with white hair sitting at a desk with books and papers before him. His face was familiar to her, and what was more surprising she could put a name to the face, though she could not say that she had ever seen the man. The figure in the chair remained quite still. It had a listening look, as though some sound had interrupted

the man in his work.

Then, she saw him draw a writing-pad towards him, pick up a pencil, and jot down something on the pad. She wished that she could read what he had written. Abruptly — the picture vanished, leaving her uttering a name.

"Sir Roger Lyall."'

Who was Sir Roger Lyall?

Did he exist?

IX

LYALL paused, with his latchkey in the blue door of his house in Brunswick Square. A hired car was drawn up by the kerb, but not so directly opposite his house that he could infer its having deposited a visitor at his door.

A thought had crossed his mind. He appeared to reflect a moment, his big lion's head slightly bent, his blue eyes conveying an impression of stillness.

"I wonder!"

His housekeeper met him in the hall.

"There's a lady to see you, sir. She has been here two hours. I told her you were not in."

"What is her name?"

"She would not give any name, sir. She said that she could not go away without seeing you."

"Where is she?"

"In the dining-room, sir."

Obviously Sir Roger's housekeeper considered the visitor to be something of an oddity, but then so many odd people came to the house in Brunswick Square. She opened the dining-room door for her master, who entered, acknowledging the courtesy with a gentle movement of his massive head.

He saw a girl sitting in one of his Heppelwhite chairs, with her back to the window and the green trees in the square, and his first impression of her was of her extreme stillness, the stillness of fear. She made him think of a hare, motionless, looking at him with big brown eyes.

He gave her a little, old-fashioned bow.

"Well, young lady, what can I do for you?"

He felt her brown eyes feeling him. A hand slid along the arm of a chair. Her lips moved, but they moved so slowly that they suggested the stiffness of a year's silence.

"Sir Roger Lyall — yes — I have come up from the country. And London — London terrifies me."

"It terrifies many people. I am not surprised ——"

"I closed the window. I hope ——"

Quietly he drew up a chair, and though her sudden agitation surprised him, he looked at her as though her fear was the most natural thing in the world.

"You have not told me your name."

"Before I tell you my name — I want to ask you — whether three nights ago ——"

She saw his head rise with a little jerk of alert attention.

"Three nights ago ——? One moment. Will you excuse me?"

She nodded, and watched him go out of the room and return with something white in his hand. He closed the door, and stood there regarding her with those silent and infinitely wise eyes of his. He made her think of a big, fresh-coloured old farmer, a man of the open, tranquil and stately. She felt the goodness of him.

"Before you tell me anything — may I tell you something. Three nights ago, about half-past nine, I was writing at my desk when I felt suddenly impelled to pause and listen. Sometimes — I get messages — and I write them down. Now — this ——"

He held out the writing-pad.

"It was not exactly a message; it was more like a cry — like the cry of a bird coming out of the night. It may be — there is just the chance — and to prove the things we are trying to prove — it is necessary to seize every chance ——"

He crossed the room and handed her the writing-pad.

"Has it any significance — for you?"

She took the pad and read:

"If anyone would believe me."

For an instant there was a great stillness between them. Her eyes lifted to his, and he saw that the fear had gone.

"That was what I was crying to myself — that night — before I saw you."

"You saw me?"

He remained standing, his face making her think of the luminous face of her father.

"Yes; you were sitting in a chair, writing. Your face seemed familiar, though I cannot remember having seen you before. I am in great trouble. I was leaning over the bridge looking at the water. I saw it all in the water. And then — I heard your name."

He made a movement of the head as though bidding her go on.

"My name is Carberry — Sybil Carberry. My father died about a year and a half ago. I live very much alone; I have to live alone —— May I tell you? Oh, I must tell you. I'm not mad — but unless someone believes me ——"

"I shall believe you," he said.

She told him everything, beginning with the life at Vine Court in her father's day, and going on to describe the sudden shock of her first moments of lucidity, and how the power had grown.

"It did not worry me so much at first; but later, when I began to realize what it meant to me, I began to be afraid. I saw myself as something abnormal, a monstrosity ——"

He made a gentle and protesting movement with his hand.

"You must not say that."

"But it was the loneliness that began to terrify me. I felt that I had to keep away from people, for how could I go about seeing their naked souls, so to speak, and such souls —— Oh, not all of them are ugly —— But the solitude! I did not mind it so much at first; but later —— A horrible sense of incompleteness. I was shut away in a little world of my own. There was nobody to whom I could pour out my soul."

She paused, with eloquent eyes on his, fearing to find incredulity there though the other consciousness that was in her divined his understanding.

"I should have been so glad to die; but then, you see ——"

"It wouldn't be death," he said; "there is no death. You cannot cut the live stream of consciousness in half. Besides ——"

He sat thinking a moment.

"You are not quite alone, you know. There are others — more than the ordinary world guesses. We don't care to gabble too much. But this power of yours, this super-consciousness — or whatever we choose to call it — is rather unique. Hasn't it ever occurred to

you ——?"

Her face looked all smoothed out, and there was a radiance upon it, for here was a fellow creature who understood.

"In what way?" she asked.

"This power of yours, not as it concerns yourself, but other people ——?"

"How?"

"Isn't it on the way towards proving something, towards a possible — sacred comforting of those who are groping and crying in the dark ——?"

He saw her draw a deep and relieved breath, as though some spasm of pain had passed.

"True; that was coming from you to me, somehow, before you put it into words. I see people coloured, and you have a kind of soft silveriness. Wisdom and gentleness. Yes; I do see. You have studied these — things?"

"For twenty years — ever since I lost my wife."

"And does she ——?"

"Yes; I am sure of it. Think what that means. The immense and sacred significance of it. The creeds had died and left the world crying in a wilderness."

She bowed her head.

"I have been very selfish," she said; "and to-day — London terrified me. It was as though thousands of horrible discords were screaming in my ears. And the faces! I see faces — as they are — inside. So — you can imagine ——"

"My dear, do you see no happy, pleasant faces?"

"Oh, yes; but there are so many that are horrible. And the passions, the terrors, the greeds of London so agitate me —— I feel that I must rush away into the green solitudes ——"

There was a pause, and the old man's still eyes were looking at the trees in the square.

Suddenly, she said quite simply:

"Tell me what I ought to do."

He did not answer her at once, but got up and stood looking at the portrait of a woman hanging on the wall. It was as though he always looked at that picture when he wished to be calmed or helped.

"You must go back."

"And the solitude? But — I begin to feel ——"

"There is no solitude — no utter solitude. This green place you speak of should have something sacred about it. And presently — friends will come; I — for one — if you will let me?"

She held out a hand.

"Oh, you are giving me back hope. And perhaps — this power of mine may prove helpful?"

"Did it come to you — for nothing?" he asked her. "Try to think that it was meant to come."

Together they went out into the sunlight of the square, and as Lyall helped her into the car her eyes became suddenly smiling.

"How different you have made things. And now — the green country."

"You go back — at once?"

"Yes; I started at six this morning. I had to find you, you know. You will come ——?"

"Of course. We shall not let you alone in that green solitude."

"Good-bye," she said; "I suppose one is less afraid of life when one begins to think less of one's self."

Lyall watched the car drive away, and then, returning to the house, stood for a while looking at his wife's portrait upon the wall.

"She smiles," he thought. "How much I owe to the man who painted that picture."

X

AN "inspired boy," Lionel Strange, had painted the portrait of Lyall's wife, but that had happened more than twenty years ago, and so far as his enthusiasms were concerned, Strange had remained the eternal boy.

He had grey in his hair, and in his heart a whimsical and playful tenderness for all things that were not meanly ugly. As for life, he had learnt to hold the hot metal of it in his hand, nor could it scorch him. He had had his romance, and he had had his tragedy. He looked at life as the artist, living in the intimate glow of his world of beauty, for the metal of him was pure.

Lyall loved the man. There was no guile in him, and the treacherous urge of sex had been transmuted into the love of his craft

and all that it symbolized.

Lyall had had his own word for it.

"A man will never do his best work until he gets away from the sex obsession."

"Or sublimates it?"

"I don't like that word."

"Nor do I."

It was about the end of June when Sir Roger Lyall dropped in on Strange in his studio and found him sitting in a chair facing a picture on his easel. His long legs were stretched out, and his thin hands resting on the arms of the chair. He got up with the air of a man who was tired.

"Slack water," he said.

Lyall looked at the picture on the stand. It was a fanciful thing, a suggestion of moonlight and of dim white shapes under old trees, but there was something wrong with the picture, though it was difficult to say what was wrong with it. Strange's hand had gone astray.

"Look at that," he said.

His sensitive nostrils curved.

"All wrong. And yet — where is it wrong? One's craft is a queer thing. These sudden lapses, as though — like Christ — one feels that the virtue has gone out of us."

He stood with his fine head tilted, the boyishness of it strangely mellowed by his tawny grey hair.

"So tantalizing — these lapses!"

"My dear lad," said Lyall, "you are tired."

Strange flicked a curtain across the picture.

"Perhaps that's it. The fact is — I am getting old."

"Nonsense."

"Or lonely! When the flame dies down — there should be a comrade spirit to breathe upon it and revive it."

Lyall took him by the arm, and wheeled him out of the studio into the long room with the big eighteenth-century window overlooking the river. It was a noble room, and yet strangely *triste*, a room in which a man had begun to look at life with too much resignation.

"I have always said, my dear chap, that you have had enough

of London."

Strange laughed softly, but with a twinge of melancholy in his laughter.

"Oh — no doubt. A place in the country! How can one begin all over again? One's so helpless."

"Slack water — as you said."

They stood and looked at the river, and in Lyall's still blue eyes a kind of divine and mischievous cunning showed.

"You never paint portraits now?"

"They bore me."

"Especially — women?"

"More especially women. One asks to be impersonal."

"Supposing I told you that I had found a woman whose face would not transfer itself to canvas?"

Strange was drumming on the window ledge with his fingers.

"*Le jardin sou le pluis*," he said. "It is raining down in the west. But this hypothetical woman of yours, does she matter?"

"She is rather remarkable."

"Oh, my dear man! A beauty!"

"She is a live spirit dressed transiently in the flesh. I don't believe you could render her ——"

"Perhaps not."

"You see, I don't think you could paint a spirit, Strange. Not even you. She might terrify you, make your craft inarticulate. On the other hand ——"

Strange turned his head with a sudden smile.

"Look here, old man, what's the esoteric significance of all this?"

"I'll tell you about her, if you like. Live water, you know."

"Well, light your pipe."

Had any other man but Lyall told him the tale Strange would not have believed it. He had his moments of irreverence, but this yarn was so queer and appealing that he absorbed it with the sensitiveness of the artist. Moreover, Strange knew his friend too well to refer to him even incidentally as a sentimental fool. The case had phenomena that could be examined and verified.

"Rather a spookish young woman."

"Don't scoff, my dear chap."

"God forbid. I'm cynical and sceptical only when I'm tired. But

how excessively uncomfortable — to be able to look into the mental interior of your butcher and your baker ——"

He became aware of the mild severity of Sir Roger's eyes.

"I am going to convince you. Consider a moment what this means. No man — knowing her to be what she is — would dare to face this extraordinary insight of hers — unless ——"

Strange understood.

"It is as though you were daring me to meet her."

"I am."

The artist sat up in his chair with the air of a man who has seen some startling incident happening outside his window.

"Good heavens! But if she is what you say —— An ordeal! Why, worse than facing a firing party. This insight of hers shooting right through you."

"But can you imagine a more splendid adventure?"

"An adventure!"

"Say peril. Would you dare it?"

Strange's eyes swept slowly to Lyall's face.

"I don't know. People must shock her pretty horribly, I suppose?"

"Of course. But think of it — from her point of view. Loneliness was driving her mad. I admit that I was a little scared. Like going to one's last judgment, you know. But it was a thing that had to be faced. Apparently — I do not hurt her."

"And you want me to go down there?"

"Dare you?"

Strange stood up and went to the window.

"How often have you been there?" he asked.

"Three or four times."

"But why ask me?"

"Simply — because — you are the only living man I can think of — who — might be able to help her."

"Help her!"

Strange's face had grown infinitely solemn.

"I might do the other thing," he said.

XI

SYBIL CARBERRY received two letters, with an interval of three or

four days between them.

The first was from Sir Roger Lyall.

> "I wonder if you would let a friend of mine paint your garden — Lionel Strange ——? You should have heard of him.
>
> "He will not bother you. In fact, if you give him permission — he won't expect you to do the social thing. You can regard him as part of the garden."

She replied, after some reflection, that Mr. Strange could paint what he pleased in the Vine Court garden, provided it was understood that she need not interview him.

> "It sounds churlish, my friend, but I have such a fear of strangers. You may tell Mr. Strange that I am rather eccentric."

The second letter was a formal note from Lionel Strange himself.

> "Dear Miss Carberry,
>
> "Our mutual friend tells me that I have your permission to spend a few hours making studies of your garden. Please accept my thanks. I assure you that I shall take every care not to make myself a nuisance.
>
> "Believe me,
>
> "Yours truly,
>
> "Lionel Strange."

In spite of its formality the letter interested her. Sitting in the dusk among her roses, she held the letter against her forehead, but it gave her no vision of the man who had written it. And yet it roused in her an awareness of the writer as of a person not to be feared. She wondered how much Lyall had told him? But did it matter? She was free to be as aloof as she pleased.

There was no time in the year when Vine Court was not beautiful, for Ignatius Carberry had realized that for an English garden to be satisfying it must be regarded as a stage set for the performance of a perpetual winter.

"Why plan for three days of summer, when you should scheme

for nine months' rain?"

But at the end of June, summer or no summer, the exuberance of colour would not be discouraged. It bubbled and frothed in the green spaces, and ran like fire up trellises and over architraves, and veined the crevices between the stones of the paths. Beautiful in winter, with something of the Italianesque love of stone and masses of deep green conifers, it became in summer a pleasaunce of ordered and shy splendour.

Lying in bed Sybil could see the Penzance briars running in flame along the beams of the stone pergola. The sun was shining; there had been rain in the night, and the breath of the morning was tranquil and fragrant.

Kate arrived in the room with her mistress's early tea.

"That gentleman's come, Miss."

"What gentleman, Kate?"

"The artist gentleman — Mr. Strange. The one you told me might go into the garden."

"At this hour?"

"Yes; Mr. Boggis told me he was here at half-past six. Walked over from Spellford. He came up to the house when we were drawing up the blinds, and rang the bell. Asked me to take his compliments to you, and to say that you were not to trouble. Said he might be gone by the time you had finished breakfast."

Sybil was sitting up in bed, groping for something at the back of Kate's mind, but since Kate was a person who could be treated intimately, Sybil asked her a question.

"A friend of Sir Roger Lyall's. Rather like Sir Roger?"

"Oh, not so old, Miss. Might be quite young — though he's going grey. A quiet sort of gentleman. Looks as though he thought much more than he said."

"I did not hear his voice."

"You wouldn't, Miss. The sort of voice that talks to itself."

Sybil's feeling was that Kate had fallen to Lyall's friend. "The sort of voice that talks to itself." And curiosity is piqued by the little human touches, so surely that her curiosity brought Carberry's daughter out of bed when the door had closed on the faithful Kate. She crossed to the window, and keeping close to one of the curtains, looked out to see if she could catch a glimpse of this man who got

up at five in the morning and walked two miles in order to sketch a garden.

Enthusiasm! Enthusiasm counts. Or, in this case, was she to look for a very delicate consideration, the kind of consideration one might expect from a man whose voice talked to itself? How different from the John Bull bellow! She stood at the window and played the spy.

"Now — I wonder?" she thought. "On a morning like this, with the sun where it is, I should choose the moat — and the grey bridge — and the big cedar in the background."

A moment later she caught a glimpse of him in the distance, a long-legged, brown-coated creature with slightly bent and appreciative shoulders, idling across the grass beyond the trees. He wore no hat; his hands were in his trousers pockets. He drifted, pausing now and again to stand quite still, absorbing things, letting his eyes wander. The figure had a curious tranquillity; it moved with a restful leisureliness. She saw him cross to the pergola; he bent down and touched the flowers in the long border, and she could tell that his touch was very gentle. It made her think of a hand playfully taking the faces of children and tilting them to be looked at with a secret smile.

"He is in no hurry to begin," she reflected.

He was not. Either he was getting his atmosphere, or the atmosphere of the garden had got him. He was part of it, as the birds and the insects and the flowers were part of it. Instead of sitting down on a stool to splash colours upon a canvas he wandered about letting life impress its aliveness upon him.

"He can't be very young," she thought; "for the young want to snatch things for themselves, pull the apple from the tree, paint a picture that shall make people exclaim."

She felt a queer thrill of pleasure.

He was coming across the grass. She saw him pause under one of the trees and look up into the green dome of it. A flicker of sunlight touched his head and face and made them luminous. He had a rapt air, as though he had found himself in a world of dreams.

He walked on. She noticed that he did not glance at the house; it appeared that he could observe without staring, and she understood this more sensitive receptivity. He came to the end of the long walk between the lawns, and stood there looking along the

grey repose of the broad and paved path stretching between the statues. He walked along it towards the square opening in the yew hedge, and it seemed to her he floated slowly on those long legs of his. He disappeared.

She felt a strange stillness within herself, a premonitory holding of the breath.

She dressed and went downstairs.

In the middle of breakfast she rang for Kate.

"Oh, Kate. I wonder if Mr. Strange would like us to send him out some breakfast."

"Shall I go and ask him, Miss?"

"You might."

She sat and waited for Kate's return, touching nothing — meanwhile — upon the table.

Kate came back.

"The gentleman thanks you, Miss, but he says that he has had breakfast."

"Is he painting?"

"No, Miss, not exactly. I found him sitting on the bridge, looking at the water. He didn't seem to know I was there until I spoke to him."

"Oh!"

"And then he gave a sort of start and looked at me as though he had been asleep."

"Or had come out of another world, Kate."

"Yes, Miss, just like that."

All that morning Sybil Carberry remained a creature of indecision. She felt drawn towards the garden, and yet she did not venture into it, for her desire for the garden was mingled with the dread of having to come to some decision. Strange was out there, painting, or at least she presumed him to be out there, and her absurd shrinking from coming into personal contact with the man was a confession that her meeting with him would matter.

Yet — why should it matter?

She was shut up in the castle of her loneliness, and she could conceive of no knight errant coming to rescue her, and even were he to come her eyes would pierce right through the armour of the flesh — and see —— Yes; what would she see?

That was the reason why she feared to meet Lyall's friend.

In the afternoon she went out by way of the kitchen garden and the orchard into the park, and wandered there for a while, wondering if Strange was painting still. She could see no sign of him on the bridge or terrace; and, in returning through the orchard, she came upon old Boggis spreading fresh straw on one of the strawberry beds.

She stopped and spoke to him.

"Is the gentleman still in the garden?"

Boggis, crouching, looked up at her under the brim of his old straw hat.

"Him, Miss? He didn't do no painting, so far as I saw. He went hours ago."

"Quite early — then?"

"Must have been about ten o'clock. He came and asked me the name of one of them Hybrid Teas."

"He's fond of flowers — then?"

"You can tell if a pusson's fond o' flowers, Miss, by their way of touching 'em."

So Strange had come at half-past six and had left at ten o'clock. And he appeared to have done nothing with his brushes. What was the meaning of this idle elusiveness? Had he found nothing that he cared to paint, or had he been persuaded to enjoy the beauty of the place without the trouble of painting it? And was she to consider his behaviour as delicately courteous and self-effacing, and that this early arrival and departure had been so arranged that he should not trespass upon her solitude?

Or, was it possible that he was a shy man and afraid of meeting her?

Had Lyall told him anything about her?

Could there be any likeness between his fear of meeting her, and her fear of meeting him?

The day that followed was as still and as sunny as its predecessor, and as Sybil Carberry stood at her window and watched the sunlight sifting through the trees, it seemed to her absurd that she should fear anything on such a day. She had had news of Mr. Lionel Strange. He had wandered up to the house about half-past six, carrying all his professional paraphernalia, and had exchanged a

few words with Kate. Rumour had it that he was somewhere on the terrace above the moat, and that Pedro the spaniel was attending him while he worked.

Sybil came to a decision — for the making of a decision was being forced upon her by some mysterious movement of life's emanations. What were words? Was she not passing beyond the world of words and of the five senses? She had to confess that the coming of this man who was Lyall's friend had stirred something in her as the wind stirs the trees. She had not spoken to him or looked into his eyes, and yet she had a feeling that he was for her a creature of destiny.

She did not go direct to the terrace by way of the paved walk between the statues, but crossing the great lawn she reached the vine covered belvedere behind the garden house. Her approach was studied. She wanted to see without being seen, to feel how he affected her, whether there was anything of the Jeremy in him.

She was afraid of the Jeremy in men.

Strange had posted himself at the end of the bridge with the grey sweep of the terrace before him, and the great cedar sunning itself against the blue of the sky. He had borrowed one of the chairs from the garden house. Pedro was curled up beside the chair.

"My dog has surrendered," she thought.

Her light feet carried her to the balustrading of the terrace, and perched there within ten yards of him she sat at gaze. Her eyes were wide open and questioning, and to those who came to know her in after years her eyes were more than eyes. They suggested an extraordinary depth, with a mysterious luminosity in the depths of them, as of a very gentle and wonderful intelligence that was not of the world of the senses. She was looking at Strange's long back, and his rather narrow and shapely head poised attentively above the canvas.

She saw him as he saw the cedar, suffused with a soft and golden light, a tranquil spirit, extending to life a whimsical yet reverent tenderness. The light played upon his greyish, tawny hair. The line of his cheek and jaw formed a brown curve. The hand holding the brush had very long and sensitive fingers.

She gazed, drawing a deep breath now and again, for in this fellow human she divined a sensitiveness that almost equalled her

own. He was male and yet not male; he was her opposite and yet her like; he looked at beauty as she looked at it, into it and beyond it. He saw the spirit of things.

Suddenly he turned about, brush in one hand, palette in the other. There was no surprise in his eyes. It was as though he had known that she was there.

For some seconds they looked at each other. Then, he rose. He came forward a few steps; his face was infinitely grave. But his eyes were the centre for the holding of her consciousness, for into them she saw rising a light of wonder, astonishment and half incredulous comprehension.

"Thank you — for coming," he said.

He seemed to be speaking to himself as well as to her. She stood up. She was aware of a soft blaze of emotion, a kind of exultant glow within herself.

"I think I had to come," she answered.

They stood, and looked at each other. He smiled very faintly, while she felt on the edge of tears, tears born of a strange ecstasy. She was experiencing the incredible, that which a woman in her spirit dreams might yearn to feel and yet find the spell of it eluding her.

For he was looking at her as a lover who does not realize that he loves, or rather — he saw the beauty of her as he might see the beauty of a sunset or a cloud, impersonally and yet with a deep and personal wonder. She amazed him. She — the woman — the spirit — the symbol. And the light of his homage was a clear, white light, the coarser rays of it lost in the merging of a complete understanding.

Pedro, waddling in between them, with a smirk on his face, and looking from one to the other, suggested the genial person undertaking a formal introduction.

"Mr. Strange — Miss Carberry. Friends of mine, both of you, you know."

She bent down and pulled the spaniel's ears.

"My dear, how very fat you are getting."

Strange's downward glance lost some of its seriousness.

"That's a most tactless thing to say, even to a dog."

For the first time since her father's death she reacted to a spirit

of playfulness. She had been waiting for a play fellow — one who had not the soul of a lout, and whose idea of a jest would be something more subtle than the throwing of bread pellets or the pulling of her spiritual hair.

"Pedro," she said solemnly, with a finger held in front of his nose, "you will have to have your portrait painted before you grow too much like a city father."

"May I have the commission?"

"I should have thought," she said, "that the painting of city fathers——"

"I have done it — once or twice. Besides, Pedro can be forbidden in the kitchen."

She rose in one quick movement.

"I'm stopping your work——"

"Oh, it does not matter. And yet it does matter. The sunlight is just where I want it."

"Please go on. I'm not an interfering spirit."

"Yes and no," he said with that faint, elvish smile of his; "but please, don't go away."

He brought a second chair from the garden-house, and placed it where she was wishing him to place it, close to the balustrade so that she could see the water.

"Thank you. I won't talk."

She sat down, and he resumed his place, with his back towards her.

"That's it. Need one talk? There comes a time when one loses the gabbling instinct. Strange thing — the beginnings and growth of speech. Eloquence! Eloquent people are very exhausting."

He dabbed his brush on his palette, and sat gazing at the cedar.

"There you are," he said.

"That is the kind of eloquence that does not exhaust you."

"Surely — yes. And you?"

Her eyes were on the cedar, with its green ledges separating the sunlight from the shadow.

"I — sometimes — feel that I am forgetting how to talk. The spoken word seems less and less necessary."

"Mæterlinck said something like that!"

"Did he?"

"And I heard a bright old lady scoffing at the idea. You see, parrots can't be expected —— As one gets older — those long-seeming silences. No obvious tick-tack, no clockwork phrases. Instead, you see and hear and feel life moving."

"Like that tree," she said, as a light breeze caused the branches of the cedar slightly to sway.

He made a movement of the head and went on with his work, while she sat there in silence, the silence of a wonderful new comradeship. She felt peace about her, the peace of a tranquil understanding. She felt his consciousness there close to her like some complete flower, or a lamp burning steadily, or a clear sky into which you gazed without the need of saying:

"Oh, sky — why are you blue?"

Her hands lay in her lap. She watched the play of the sunlight on the water and the trees, and the gradual growth of the picture under his brush. He painted steadily, as though her presence were part of the beauty about him, and as though his consciousness was undisturbed by it.

And for two hours they remained thus without a spoken word.

XII

ON THE third day Strange asked her if he might paint her portrait, though she knew that he had been going to ask her.

"If you wish to ——"

"Not for exhibition. Unless you wish it to be exhibited?"

"I am a solitary. Perhaps you understand."

She noticed that he did not look at her for a moment, as though he were so vividly aware of her mysterious insight that it was like the glare of an unaccustomed light.

"Lyall told me ——"

She stood very still.

"Ah, he did ——"

"That he doubted whether I could paint you, the real, miraculous you —— I'll try."

"Will it be so very difficult?" she asked.

He compelled himself to a steady meeting of the eyes.

"The most difficult thing I have attempted — ever. And yet — it

may be quite easy, if you help me. The venture is so big — beyond mere line and colour."

She looked at the sunlit water.

"Why?"

"But you know."

"Do I? Of course. I do know."

"It was natural that I should be afraid."

"Of me?"

"Those inward eyes of yours. I made myself come here. And then — that second morning — I felt you behind me, and I ceased to be afraid."

She was smiling at some inward fancy.

"Yes, if we are not afraid of our own thoughts! Then, fear ceases — utterly."

"Or the thoughts of others?"

"Ah, yes. But then — you."

"I?"

"To you, beauty is something sacred. You stand before it — awed and happy. You do not rush to tear the rose from the bush, or to crush the grape and turn it into a little heat for your body. And I — I am the same. And how weak and absurd and unreal we must seem to the plain, practical world, the world that makes machines and money, and whose soul may be a butcher's shop."

He laughed softly.

"John Bull has no use for us. But how could he? Or the *Punch* world, or the hard, practical people? We are all moonlight and nonsense. There is nothing real outside the 'High Street.' Cranks! A couple of white-blooded cranks — you and I."

"But — sometimes — don't the other people have glimmerings?"

"Horrid, uncomfortable things — glimmerings. When you get them, you go and see a medical man, or walk out into the High Street and look at the strings of sausages, or the nice solid stuff in the ironmonger's window. But we — we live."

His painting of her portrait was a subtle experience for them both. He made her sit in the garden house, between the two white classic pillars, and in the shadow, so that she looked out at him from a background of shadows. He worked with an inspired swiftness, and with an insight that surpassed the most vivid of any of

his previous portraits. It was as though she — the woman with all her mystery and uniqueness — flowed on to the canvas through his brush.

He worked in silence, absorbed, nor had she any wish to break the spell. She sat there, feeling the clean and eager touch of his glances and the rich and mellow consciousness behind them. She was at peace with herself and with him. She was as absorbed in his contemplation of her as he was in contemplating her, and it was a double soul that merged into his interpretation of Sybil Carberry.

She sat for an hour at a time, nor would he let her see the work in its makings.

"No, not till you are complete."

Old Boggis, who considered that he had every right to be interested in his mistress's romance, was the first of the public to view that portrait. There it was, set upon its easel in the garden house between the two white pillars, and looking like an altar piece. The sun was in old Boggis's eyes, shining from under the edge of a black rain cloud, for it was a day of showers.

"Lordie!" said he, staring hard at the picture; "bless me if I have ever seen her look like that. And yet — I dunno —— She don't look quite human — sometimes. Them eyes ——!"

In turning away he cast his gaze across the park, and under a beech tree he saw two figures.

"Lovers," thought he.

But had old Boggis been able to hear what they were saying to each other he would have thought it the strangest sort of talk for lovers.

"It is a pretty fierce ordeal for a man to have to face ——"

"But need you fear? If the you that I feel is the whole you ——"

"Queer," said he with that little smile of his, "think of life's details. A man may smoke too much, and his tie may prove fractious, and you — you will be knowing all the things that he is saying to his tie. Think of it!"

Her hands were on his shoulders.

"Well, why not? I should know when to come and tie your tie for you. That's comradeship."

And on the terrace another figure had arrived, the figure of a

tall, white-headed man with still blue eyes. He stood by the garden house and looked at the picture and a sudden shower pattered upon the stones and blurred the glassy surface of the moat.

"Wonderful," he said to himself. "Strange has seen her — as she is. He had the cleanness and the courage."

He — too — walking bare-headed in the rain, saw the two figures standing under the great green canopy of the distant beech tree. He stood and smiled.

"Blessed are the pure in heart," he thought, "for they shall see their God."

The Cave

DOCTOR Z. WROTE TO DOCTOR X

"My Friend,

"Once again I am able to place at your disposal a case that should enable you to examine the effect of a sudden change of environment upon a depressed mentality. My patient, Monsieur Lugard, will arrive at your villa one evening this week. Ostensibly he will be travelling by car to play golf at St. Jean. He will be wise as to the situation, but only so far as it concerns his choice between now and to-morrow. Salutations.

"Z."

On the very day that the letter was written and posted, a very tired man left Paris in his car, with golf clubs and a couple of suitcases in the dickey, and the prospect of a month's golf before him. Lugard was the English manager of the French branch of "The International Oil Co." The financial affairs of the company had been suffering a process of expansion and redistribution, and though Lugard had overworked himself for the last three months, he was not a medical case, though his face was the face of a man who needed the open air. His eyes looked strained.

His car was a new two-seater "Mercury." He was alone, and he drove her hard the first day, stopped at Pons for the night, and slept like a log. The second day's run should have landed him at St. Jean in time for dinner, but in the pinewoods of Remy he lost both his way and his temper, and his car — piqued by his handling of her — lost her's. Just about sunset she stuck in one of the forest roads in the thick of a gloom of pines, and refused to budge; and nothing that Lugard could do would persuade the engine to function.

He was hot and he was angry. He could see the setting sun as a

yellow blur beyond the trunks of the trees, but the forest of Remy stretched for miles and was practically uninhabited. Not a garage, not a telephone; and Lugard, exasperated, wiped oily hands on a silk handkerchief, and supposed that the car had the laugh of him.

He left her there. He went on to explore the road which was little better than a forest track. The pines hemmed him in with their multitudinous dark trunks. The evening was strangely still, and the canopy of foliage overhead made the night seem more imminent; and as Lugard followed the track he felt a restlessness possess him. The adventure was not all to his liking. He was thinking of the dinner and the bed that were waiting for him at the Golf Hotel at St. Jean. He had no desire to play at being a tramp or gipsy.

But suddenly at a point where the track turned towards the sea the pinewoods broke and drew apart. The dense dark green of the rolling tops edged a narrow valley, and in the distance Lugard saw a light—a little silver point piercing the blue dusk. It seemed to him to be about half a mile away. Feeling relieved and hopeful, he walked towards it.

But he had not gone far before the light ceased to be a single point. There were other lights, and Lugard's hypothetical cottage expanded into a house. He was surprised. All those lighted windows promised a building of some size, and in this very solitary spot he had expected to find nothing larger than the lodge of a *garde-champêtre*. He came to a wire fence and a hedge and a pair of gates, and soon afterwards the garden began. He was astonished at the size of the garden. He could see the house on some rising ground nearer the sea, a big, dim, white place, and rather mysterious in spite of its lighted windows. Passing a bed of white flowers he caught the scent of them—a strange sweet scent in the summer darkness.

The road brought him to a loggia, and at one end of it steps went up to a glazed door. It appeared to be the main entrance to the house, and after a moment's hesitation, Lugard ascended the steps and looked for the bell. He had to light a match before he found it. He rang.

A figure appeared almost immediately, crossing the big lounge hall beyond the glass door. Lugard found himself addressing a manservant in dark livery.

"Excuse me, my car has broken down. I saw your lights."

The man-servant stood back.

"Enter, monsieur."

"If I may be allowed to use your telephone. You have a telephone?"

"Yes, monsieur. Everything shall be arranged."

Lugard stepped in. Almost it seemed to him that he had been expected, which, of course, was absurd. But someone else might have been expected to arrive, and he felt vaguely piqued by the coincidence. Meanwhile the man-servant took his hat, and moving across the hall, opened a door, and bowed him in.

"If monsieur will wait I will inform my master."

Lugard walked in, and the door was closed on him. He looked around the room. It was lit by sconces in the walls; it was large and spacious and furnished with a pleasant richness. There were pictures, flowers, a piano, Persian rugs, but the feature of it that attracted his attention was the large window opposite the door. It was shaped like a classic portico with three white pylons, and partially screened by dark blue curtains. It had dignity, beauty, and he walked towards it, and finding one of the glass panels open, he stepped out. For the window opened on a white marble balcony, which was like a ledge jutting out into the summer night. Some perfume drifted up. There were stars, and over yonder a glimmering vastness that Lugard realized was the sea.

He savoured the perfume and the strangeness. He thought:

"This fellow must have spent francs by the hundred thousand. Taste, yes. I wonder——"

He stepped back into the room just as the door opened and an elderly man entered, and to Lugard the man's face was as singular as the situation. He saw a fine white head, two very dark eyes, a humorous yet firm mouth. To Lugard it was the face of a man who had had authority in the world of affairs and of men. It smiled, yet there was something behind the smile.

The man held out his hand.

"So your car broke down. Do not trouble. I will send out my chauffeur."

Again Lugard had a strange sense of the expected. He started to explain.

"I have come from Paris. My name is Lugard. English, yes. I was on my way to St. Jean to play golf."

The shrewd, understanding eyes confronted him.

"Exactly. You are very welcome."

"If you will allow me to use your telephone."

"There is no need. We shall be very glad to put you up for the night. My chauffeur will examine your car. If necessary we can telephone to St. Jean. I assure you that you are very welcome."

Lugard stared at him.

"You are very good, sir, but really——"

"We will make you as comfortable as possible."

Again Lugard got the impression that his sudden appearance here in this unknown house was less unexpected than it seemed. But if someone was expected how was it that his host had accepted his name. It was rather extraordinary. Meanwhile the other man was smiling at him as though he too had discovered something unusual in the situation. There was a smile behind his smile.

"We dine, Monsieur Lugard, at eight. My wife, Madame Xavier, will be very glad to welcome you."

"You are very charming."

That smile, and those shrewd kind eyes puzzled Lugard. It was as though the other man was suggesting to him that he understood some particular concealment, and that explanations were unnecessary. And Lugard felt challenged. Well, if he had landed himself in some mystery, it could not be very serious. Besides, the situation was rather interesting, and acting upon impulse, he decided to carry the thing through. When the *dénouement* arrived he could laugh and apologize.

He said:

"Well, I can only thank you, sir. My luggage is in the car."

"It shall be brought in."

He bowed.

"So much trouble——"

"Not at all. And now, I dare say you have driven far. My man shall show you upstairs."

Ten minutes later Lugard found himself in a charming little suite, bedroom, dressing-room and bathroom. There was a sound of running water; the servant was filling the bath. And Lugard,

feeling dusty and a little tired, reflected:

"Well, this is a rum business, but a man couldn't be more comfortable. Let us play the comedy through. If these good people ever come to Paris, I will see that they get roses for roses."

He undressed. He found a white bath wrap spread on a chair, and as he stepped down into the blue and white tiled bath he heard his luggage being carried in. Even his golf clubs had been recovered from the car. He heard the click of metal against metal.

The voice of the valet addressed him:

"Dr. Xavier's chauffeur has examined your car, monsieur. It is the magneto. They will tow the car in."

Lugard, splashing luxuriously, made some conventional reply.

So his host was a doctor. But a doctor of what; of Law, or Medicine, or Letters? But did it matter? This was as good or better than the Golf Hotel at St. Jean.

He found his evening clothes laid out; he dressed, and went downstairs. His host was waiting for him in the hall.

"This way, Monsieur Lugard. You must meet my wife and daughter."

In the salon Lugard was provided with additional surprises. Two very charming women rose to meet him. Madame Xavier was a little lady, with a high colour and bright eyes, plump yet still very graceful. She smiled at Lugard with an air of motherliness.

"You must be very tired, monsieur. This is Pauline."

Lugard found himself bowing to the daughter. She was tall and dark, with a perfect white skin, and quite undecorated. She had an air of mischievous insouciance, and the frank, free glance of the modern.

She shook hands with him.

"Bad luck about your car."

"Perhaps!" said Lugard, and smiled; "perhaps!"

They went in to dinner. The room was in the Louis Quinze style, though the garishness of that period had been softened. The dinner was excellent. Never had Lugard sat down with three more charming people. Almost he began to feel that he had known them for years.

On the other hand Pauline was a delightfully novel exponence. He began to wonder whether she played golf. The Xavier villa

could not be more than twenty kilometres from St. Jean.

The evening seemed to pass very quickly, for at ten Madame Xavier and her daughter went off to bed.

"In the country we go to bed early. I garden, monsieur; and Pauline bathes and plays golf."

Lugard and Dr. Xavier were left alone together, and Dr. Xavier began to talk of Paris, and city life and the strain of modern conditions, and Lugard got the impression that his host was not only a very wise and sympathetic person, but that he had reasons of his own for leading the conversation in that direction. The doctor's eyes seemed to observe him. And he would remain silent for some seconds as though he expected Lugard to begin some personal confession. Once or twice he asked a leading question, but so quietly that it failed to appear aggressive or curious.

"So you are in business."

Yes; Lugard was in business, big business. He was rather sick of it, and he said so.

"I often wonder, doctor, whether the thing is worth while. It enslaves you; it sucks you dry. I'm rather thinking of throwing in my hand. After all, what is life?"

The doctor observed him.

"You have been overworking."

"Yes; but I'm finished."

"You think so. I — too — had a period in my life when I was working too hard. So, you feel that you want to go to sleep?"

"Yes; that's just the expression. To sleep and forget."

The man-servant came carrying a tray with decanters, glasses, and a syphon, and obeying a sign from the doctor placed the tray on a table and retired. Dr. Xavier rose. He smiled at Lugard, and his smile had a meaning.

"Let me mix you my particular draught."

"I leave it to you, doctor."

His host filled a wine glass, and Lugard noticed that he handled two or three of the decanters on the tray.

"You really wish to go to sleep, Monsieur Lugard?"

"For choice, yes."

"We will call this a night-cap."

Lugard never remembered going to bed.

He woke in darkness, and the very darkness was strange. He was lying upon a substance that was both hard and soft; his hands touched the smooth dry surface, and he realized that he was lying upon sand. The air was chilly, and out of the darkness came strange reverberations, a coming and going as of waves rolling in and rolling out. He sat up. He was still wearing the evening clothes of the night before.

What the devil?

Yes, he was awake — very much awake. Something very extraordinary had happened. He remembered everything to a point — a glass, an amber-coloured liquid in it, the watchful, smiling face of his host. But what did it mean? Where was he? What sort of trick had these people played upon him? And why?

He stood up, and suddenly fear possessed him — a strange, nameless fear. He shivered. Almost he had the feeling that he was dead and buried, and yet alive in some dark place underground. He had a moment of panic. He passed a hand over his face; he touched himself; he felt for the heart-beat at his wrist; he listened.

Where was he? The darkness seemed opaque, and then he realized that this blackness was changing. Far away a faint crevice seemed to let in dim and diffused light. He was in a cave, and that rolling, thunderous sound was the sea breaking in the mouth of it.

He groped for the wall of the cave. He found it, and with his hands he began to follow the rocky face. It went on and on; it seemed interminable, and then he grasped the fact that he was going round in a circle. That part of the cave in which he was had the shape of a pit.

His panic mood returned. He sat down on the sand; he made a great effort to control himself and to think. What did it mean? What could it mean? He had been drugged and carried down here, and left. But what was the motive? His wallet was still in his pocket. Besides, the idea of robbery was ridiculous.

Again he traced out the walls of the cave, with his arms at full stretch. He touched nothing but rock; it went up out of his reach.

And then the grotesque thought came to him that he was dead, or supposed to be dead. He had disappeared. He was shut away deep down in this blackness, and there was no sound save the

sound of the distant sea. The thing was absurd, but it was reality. He remembered Dr. Xavier's queer smile, and his air of meaning something that he — Lugard — had not grasped.

He sat on the sand; he listened; he fixed his eyes on that faint and distant blur of light. The silence seemed all the more final because of the moaning of the sea. It seemed to him that hours passed. The very darkness was like a slipping away of time. He felt that he had been in this place for days and days.

The sun! Would he ever see the sun again? But what an abominable, mad phantasy was this! That smiling, white-haired man, and his wife, and Pauline! It was melodrama. He sat with his head in his hands.

Suddenly he heard a voice. It made a hollow sound in that dark place. It seemed to come from every side of the cave.

"Is the soul of man there?"

Lugard got to his feet. He was trembling.

"Who's that?"

The voice came again.

"Is the soul of man satisfied with death? For death may be like this cave. Not sleep and a forgetting."

And Lugard raged.

"Hell! What's the game. Let me out of this. Who is it that's speaking. If this is a joke, it's the damndest silly joke."

Light came. It poured in through an opening in the rocky wall, and Lugard saw a flight of steps and Dr. Xavier standing there, incredibly real and modern in plus fours.

"I hope you haven't had too restless a night, Lugard. So, you want to see the sun again, to live, to play golf?"

Lugard stared at him. His chin quivered.

"What the devil does all this mean?"

"My dear fellow, you are a patient of my friend's, Dr. Z. Is not that so?"

"Dr. Z. I have never met a Dr. Z."

"But your name's Lugard. He sent you here. You had — if I may put it frankly, suicidal inclinations."

"I? Good Lord, no."

"But, my dear fellow, a Lugard was coming from Paris in a car, ostensibly to play golf at St. Jean. But he was coming to me under

the impression——"

And suddenly Lugard laughed.

"Heavens, what a mix up! I have a cousin in Paris. I haven't seen him for months, rather a melancholy devil. Yes; he plays golf, and damned bad golf. But, doctor, why didn't you——?"

They went up together into the sunlight, and Lugard saw the sun, and a clump of fir trees and the blue of the sea. He stood there listening to the doctor's explanations, but he was thinking chiefly how good life was. And he was hungry.

Then both of them laughed.

"But what an idea, doctor, to cure a potential suicide by letting him wake up down there! And Jimmy Lugard, my melancholy cousin, has yet to arrive."

"That's so."

"And you'll put him down there?"

"Perhaps."

"By Jove, I'd like to watch the experiment. Also, I'd like——"

"A bath and some breakfast?"

"Yes; but a round of golf with your daughter."

Dr. Xavier took Lugard by the arm.

"Well, possibly that can be arranged."

Lugard had his bath and his breakfast; and also his game of golf with Pauline. The doctor's car drove them over to St. Jean, and brought them back again to the villa among the pines, for the magneto of Lugard's car had to be left at a garage for repairs. Moreover, the doctor had said to him:

"I owe you a real bed, my dear fellow, after that night in our wizard's cave. And any day this cousin of yours may arrive."

Lugard smiled at the doctor.

"You may want me out of the way. And yet I should like to see my melancholy cousin's face when he emerges."

"It might add naturalness to the scene."

"But I say, doctor, isn't it possible that that sort of experience might drive a man off his head? I felt rather——"

"A man who wants to commit suicide is insane. One has to restore the urge to live. I take that risk."

So Lugard stayed on at the villa for another day, and on the evening of the second day the other Lugard arrived. Harry and

Pauline had been down to bathe, and at the edge of the pinewoods the doctor met them.

"Your *alter ego* has arrived. Come in and help to entertain him."

They found James Lugard sitting in the drawing-room and staring at the sea. He had a crumpled look, a pasty face and listless eyes, and a fatal air of self-pity.

His cousin hailed him.

"Fancy you turning up here, Jim."

The other Lugard held out a thin hand.

"My dear fellow, you startled me. Your voice—is so powerful."

"Bosh. Brought your clubs with you?"

"I can't play golf these days."

"Wait and see."

But nothing appeared capable of arousing this other Lugard from his dead-eyed apathy. He could look at Pauline as though he feared the compelling youth of her. He dined on nothing, picking at his food, like a sick bird. His cousin's presence annoyed him; he could not explain it. He sat and listened to Pauline's singing as though he was so absorbed in the painful process of digestion that beauty of sound or colour could not concern him.

Later, the doctor made a sign to Harry, and Harry Lugard understood. He got up, politely suppressing a yawn.

"If you don't mind, doctor, I'll turn in. This sea air——"

He left his cousin and old Xavier alone together, and stood at his bedroom window and looked at the stones and wondered. Yes; life was good. And the face and the voice and the youth of Pauline were exquisite. And was Xavier going to shut up that melancholy cousin of his in the cave, and if so what would be the effect of so fantastic an experience? The fellow might come out raving.

Lugard went to bed, but he wanted to wake early, and the urge was so strong in him that he woke just as the dawn was breaking. He got up and dressed, and went down into the garden, and walked up and down in front of the house. It was a most perfect dawn, still and stealthy, and in the silence of it old Xavier joined him.

They looked at each other, and Lugard knew that his cousin was in the cave.

"May I come?"

"No; it would not be fair. It would destroy that feeling of confi-

dence that must exist, and the secrecy."

"I understand. I shall know nothing."

The doctor nodded.

Lugard returned to his bedroom and sat at the open window. He waited; he waited a long time, and then he saw two figures coming up through the garden. One of the figures paused on a piece of grass; it stood erect; it stretched out its hands to the sun.

Almost, Lugard held his breath. He saw his cousin go to a bed of roses, and bend down, and press his face against the flame of the red flowers. He seemed to inhale the perfume.

Lugard drew back. He had a feeling that he had seen a man in the act of rediscovering the wonder of life and the splendour of living. He smiled.

"It has worked. Poor devil."

He was conscious of strange gladness. It was as though, on this most beautiful morning, he could share the reawakening of this other soul — this refilling of the cup of life. He seemed to hear Pauline singing one of Schubert's songs.

He lit a cigarette.

"We'll play golf to-day, a foursome perhaps? I'll let poor old Jim be Pauline's partner. But only for to-day."

And golf it was, the strangest and most mystical game that Lugard had ever played.

Precious Stones

ANYTHING RUSSIAN IS CONSIDERED TO BE EITHER ROMANTIC OR FETID though to the well-washed world of to-day the Muscovite suggests a hairiness, and the oil of a Semitic culture.

Rostov was neither romantic nor hairy. He was a tall, dark, slightly-built young man, with a narrow face, an interesting pallor, and enigmatic eyes. Kind old ladies — and impressionable young ones — liked to think that he had suffered indescribable horrors and privations. As a matter of fact he had suffered them, but he did not talk about his experiences.

He was shaving himself at the fourth floor window of one of those flat, white Mediterranean houses. He used an old-fashioned razor. He held the tip of his nose between the first finger and thumb of his left hand. And below him Cap d'Or arrayed itself in white splendour upon its headland and along the blue rim of the Anse des Fleurs. Flags floated, the tri-color, the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack. The three white cupolas of the Hôtel Cosmopolis each carried a flag.

Michael Rostov was employed at the Cosmopolis.

A pair of trousers hung over the back of a chair. Rostov possessed two pairs of morning trousers and a morning coat. He had to be very careful with his trousers; he kept them creased under the mattress. The Cosmopolis expected a well-creased leg.

Rostov's wife had just come into the room and had taken off her hat. She was a little out of breath after climbing four flights of stairs; she looked dark and delicate, for she never had quite enough to eat, and she spent some eight hours each day serving in a lace and fancy shop in the Rue du Gare. It was a tiresome shop; the proprietress was greedy, and you had to be so persuasive trying to make idle people buy perfectly unnecessary articles — applice coats, vivid jumpers, little luxuries in lace, handbags, leather work. Vera Rostov ended most days with shadows under her eyes.

She sat down and looked at her husband, who was washing the remains of the lather from his face. She both loved her husband and was afraid of him — afraid that some day he might suddenly realize her as an encumbrance and wish to be free. Life would be so much easier for a man like Michael if he were free.

For Cap d'Or did not know that Vera was Rostov's wife. She was supposed to be his sister, and even as his sister she remained very much veiled. These unfortunate Russians were, of course, very interesting; but then Cap d'Or was predominantly feminine, and Michael danced so exquisitely. He was supposed to be a prince disguised as a lounge lizard. As a matter of fact he had been a prince.

Rostov was wiping his face. He turned to look at his wife. She was tired. She had come back from the shop during the midday closing hour to prepare and to share *déjeuner* with him. And as Rostov looked at her he remembered his first interview with the polished person who managed the Cosmopolis.

"Married?"

"Yes."

"You can't be married for this job. It isn't *à la mode*."

"Very well — I'm not married. I have a sister."

For the Rostovs had been very hungry in those days, and hunger is a powerful persuader. And Michael loved Vera, though the how and why of it was beyond him, especially so in an age when it is becoming more and more unseemly and low brow for a man to love anything. But Vera was gentle. Moreover, they had passed through the great tragedy together, and been hungry and frightened together, and a man may be modern and a Russian, and yet retain elements of decency.

He said:

"Sit still. I'm waiter to-day. I haven't been standing in a shop."

And Vera knew that he had been sitting at a table writing. He wrote in French — tales, articles, plays, — in the hope of getting something accepted and of making money. He stayed at home in the mornings to write when he had no dancing lessons to give, for staying at home saved clothes, and clothes were precious.

"What's the menu?"

He glanced at her quizzically as he turned down his shirt sleeves

and fastened the links. Vera was different from other women, or she affected him differently. He saw so much of women; women of all ages and looks who had the right to order him to dance with them, multitudinous women, flirtatious women, sentimental women, silly women, frankly adventurous women. He had had a surfeit of women; they bored him; he was like a boy who had been compelled to eat a kilo of sweets daily in a *pâtisserie* shop.

But Vera was different. She was delicate and gentle and underfed, and tired and courageous; and somehow his compassion stood over and beside her in all the flurry of a silly, pornographic, sensational, get-rich-quick world. He could not help being a cynic, but towards his wife he never felt cynical. She had reality.

He could be playful, though the world saw him as an interestingly melancholy and rather silent man with enigmatic eyes.

"What's this? *Herring à la maître d'hôtel!*"

He had opened the door of their dresser-cupboard. *Grande déjeuner* had to be as cold as the plates. Rostov spread a cloth and produced knives and forks, plates, four rolls, some butter and a wedge of cheese, a tin of herrings, two oranges, glasses. They drank water. And he had to watch his wife. Vera had a way of pretending that she was not hungry.

"*Allons!* But there is something else."

There were occasions when Rostov dined out, and he had dined out the previous night. As a boy he had amused himself with tricks of legerdemain, and on the previous night he had managed to pocket a couple of peaches. Sometimes he pocketed the most extraordinary things, the wing of a chicken wrapped up in a rice paper serviette, a soft milk roll, bon-bons, apples.

He placed the peaches in front of his wife. He laughed.

"For madame."

Vera Rostov's face quivered.

"But one for you."

"But I don't eat peaches. Oh, no. I ate peaches last night with Madame La Duchesse de Nouveau Riche. Besides, I dined so well —disgustingly well."

Almost he looked apologetic. He was presented with so many free meals. Women cultivated him. Vera had no free meals; it troubled him.

He insisted on her eating. There had been occasions when he had detected her in the crime of trying to make him eat for one when there was not enough for two. Such things happen. Some women are less high-brow than the critics.

Meanwhile, they talked, and nearly always their talk was of ways and means and of money. It had to be so. The new world was so very raw and new to them, and from being privileged people they had been driven out to join the crowd of hangers-on who coax existence from the pockets of the well-to-do. They were spongers, but without being blessed or cursed with the souls of spongers. They had known the great freedom, and always they were dreaming and scheming of escaping from the circus arena back to the boxes whence you watched other mountebanks playing tricks.

Said Michael:

"One day a week I should like to be able to change into a monkey. My revenge — yes. Think of a very active and malicious monkey turned loose in the Cosmopolis, and snatching wigs and jewellery, and throwing soft pulpy things into fat faces! My dear, it's a dream."

She was more practical. She had had to learn to make her own clothes.

"Michael, where are we going when the season ends here?"

When he was most worried he would appear most frivolous.

"Why, of course, we go to a place where a season is beginning."

"But where? The shop closes on April 15. It ceases to pay after the middle of April."

"And so does my hotel. Well, there are Paris, London, New York, all the world!"

"But the money for travelling?"

"Some of these nice people should give us a free ride in their automobiles. And then, when we arrive in Paris or London ——"

They looked at each other across the table, and in the eyes of each fear stood veiled. What a life! Always to have to hurry with worried, smiling faces at the heels of those wealthy patrons; to have to truckle to a world that had once been theirs! Yes; like half-starved dogs sniffing and fawning at a butcher's knees.

Said the woman:

"Sometimes, Michael, I wish that we had been born peasants."

He forced himself to be ironical and gay.

"Oh, no; not that dullness. Life has forced us to conduct an experiment. And, after all, what an adventure! I speak four languages. Some of these people shall be persuaded to give us a lift."

"Your women, my dear?"

"My lady patrons, my devoted dowagers, my November who will fox-trot like April."

Vera was peeling one of her peaches. Her eyes were ashamed.

"Michael, it's horrible."

For a moment his faced looked fierce.

"Yes; I'm a sort of parasite, a dancing monkey. There are times when I could cut throats and appropriate purses. What a pity that there are no seas left for pirates. Only ballrooms and cabarets. That peach looks good. Yes; I stole it," and he laughed.

At one o'clock Vera went back to her shop in the Rue du Gare and Michael prepared for the business of the day. He had a dancing lesson to give at three o'clock to a young American widow, with much money. She was interested in Rostov, she had been having dancing lessons from him for a month, and always she was trying to make him talk intimately to her of himself and his past. At four o'clock there was the *thé Dansant* at the Cosmopolis, and Rostov had to be in attendance and dance with any of the hotel guests who wished him to dance with them. A Mrs. De Quincy Evans was giving a tea party, and with one of her cosmetic smiles she had ordered Rostov to be in attendance. Mrs. De Quincy Evans was a character. She had occupied one of the most expensive suites at the Cosmopolis; she was one of those immensely wealthy women who wander about Southern Europe and North Africa. You found her at the St. George at Algiers, or at the Semiramis at Cairo, or at the Cosmopolis at Cap d'Or. Always she was dressed to the last finger nail; no one knew her age, not even her French maid who daily reconstructed Mrs. Evans' face. She was like Rome, the Eternal City, forever renewed in the midst of its ruins.

Lately Mrs. De Quincy Evans had rented a villa on the cape. She appeared every night at the Cosmopolis, glittering as though she carried half the contents of a Parisian jewellery shop. The manservant who sat beside her chauffeur was supposed to be a private detective. Rumour had it that she had bought up half the precious

stones that had been smuggled by wretched refugees out of Russia.

Rostov appeared in the vast lounge of the Cosmopolis punctually at four. He was a young man at whom people looked. He had a dark aloofness and dignity; he was very well dressed; he could stand quite still and be stared at without appearing conscious of these stares. No one supposed that he emerged from a fourth floor room in a back street, and that he had a wife who served in a shop.

Gustave, the head-waiter, floated up to Rostov with fat, oily movements. Gustave hated Rostov because Rostov was Russian and so much French money had been swallowed up in Russia, and because Rostov would not allow him to be conversational and familiar.

"That's your old woman's table."

Gustave had one of those rubber noses that wrinkle up like a dog's. He had the Frenchman's malicious, icy smirk.

"How much does she pay you to go out to dinner with her?"

Rostov stood very straight with his weight on his heels, and looked over the top of Gustave's head.

But Mrs. De Quincy Evans was arriving; she was always arriving, because her arrivals were so sensational and lengthy. If she stayed put for a moment it was a mere pause in the rhythm of her comings and goings. She was a large woman, with a glowing head and a face that was perennially peached. Her bosom suggested a velvet cushion for the display of ropes of diamonds and pearls; she could carry half a metre of precious stones round her stout neck. She bubbled and frothed. She was as festive and sly as a bottle of Veuve Clicquot. She ogled, she smiled, she undulated; she was always moving her hands which were covered with rings. She called all the waiters by their Christian names. She patted men's sleeves.

Rostov bowed to her very gravely, and she gave him a jocund glance, and with all her party in tow was met by the urbane Gustave.

"I have reserved Madame her table."

Rostov followed the party, trying not to feel like a monkey at the end of a string. The party consisted of a middle-aged woman, two girls, a young old man with an eye-glass, a youth with no chin. Mrs. De Quincy Evans settled her party; she took a long time about it; she was like a fussy, bland hen; she talked all the time.

Rostov remained poised. Mrs. De Quincy Evans' face reminded him of those two peaches which he had purloined and taken home for Vera. The peaches had belonged to Mrs. Evans. He had been dining at her villa.

Oh, that dinner! He was always rather hungry. The thought and the smell of food were eternally present in his consciousness. Odours, savoury smells, waterings of the mouth. What a body one was! And soon he would be looking at the great trays of *pâtisserie* carried round by the waiters, and wishing that he could carry a bagful home to Vera. He liked sweet cakes, and so did Vera; but Vera ate nothing between their cold *déjeuner* and a much macaronied supper.

"Michael!"

Mrs. De Quincy Evans' hand was waving him to a chair.

"People — this is Michael. Michael — my people."

He bowed gravely to the party, and with compressed lips sat down. He wondered whether Mrs. Evans realized that she spoke to him as she would have spoken to a pet dog, a Pom or a Peke. "Pou-pou, lie down," or "Pou-pou, sit up and beg." He had to submit to being petted and teased and scolded and fondled.

Michael sat down beside the middle-aged woman who looked at him rather as though he were a strange beast. She had one of those English faces that have the appearance of having been left out too long in the frost. Obviously she did not know what to say to Rostov; and he was equally mute. But Mrs. De Quincy Evans talked for the whole party.

"Yes; really I did. I put two hundred francs on thirteen, and thirteen turned up. Ah! here's the tea. Michael, what's that lazy orchestra doing? Go and tell them to play. These girls are dying to dance."

The orchestra struck up without Rostov's intervention, and having got on his feet he made his bow to the middle-aged lady.

"Will Madame dance?"

Almost she looked as shocked as though he had asked her to go to bed with him.

"I don't dance."

He raised his eyebrows gallantly over her brusquerie, and tried on the girls.

"I'd love to; but I'm awfully shy of pros."

They danced. Rostov was an artist, and yet he managed to dance with an air of polite detachment. Meanwhile, the chinless youth sat and despised him. "This Russian fellah——" The chinless one could not understand how any girl could bring herself to dance with a hired outsider!

Mrs. Evans talked. The severe lady watched and disapproved. Between his duties Rostov stood and drank tea, and looked Byronic, and managed to snatch one sugary cake. He had other people to dance with: old women and young women; ladies who were his pupils; girls who wanted to flirt with him. Pestilent business! Always he had the feeling that the men — including the waiters — looked at him askance, as at a sort of poodle.

But all such afternoons came to an end, and Mrs. De Quincy Evans' party dispersed; but she herself remained, smoking a cigarette, and retaining Rostov beside her. His association with Mrs. Evans was beginning to cause comment, and he knew it, and was irritated by it. But what could he do? Other things may have to be swallowed when you are hungry, but Mrs. De Quincy Evans was a considerable mouthful, and as he stood beside her chair and met her cosmetic smile he began to wonder what her game was. Certainly she was a woman who refused to grow old, but did her refusal include the commandeering of youth?

Was she——? But such reflections caused Rostov to feel a little stirring of nausea. The world was sufficiently raw and sordid without the admittance of such nudities. He preferred to think of Mrs. Evans as a good-natured and rather officious woman who wanted to be kind, and liked to parade her kindness.

She was taking something from her bag.

"Good boy, Michael."

He saw the hundred franc note laid on the table. It was for him — the poodle, the good dog — and he both wanted it and loathed it. She might do these things in a different way.

Mrs. Evans looked up at him archly.

"I shall be round here to-night. Come and have supper with me, my dear, afterwards."

Rostov was aware of Gustave watching them with pallid cynicism. Damn Gustave!

"Madame is too kind."

"Oh, nonsense. I like being kind. You will come."

Rostov turned up the collar of his overcoat as he left the hotel. It was a poor overcoat, cheaply in the fashion, and after dancing in an overheated hotel one had to be careful, for this Riviera climate was treacherous. One of his many fears was a dread of being ill; he could not afford to be ill. He walked fast in the direction of his back street quarter; he climbed the four flights of steps; he opened the door and saw his wife laying the table for their evening meal, bread, potage, and macaroni. Vera looked tired and paler than usual; her movements had a languor.

Rostov noticed this. Another of his fears was for his wife's health. She had suffered rather terribly during those days of bloodshed.

"Tired, Vera?"

"Only one of my headaches."

"Lie down. I'll look after the restaurant."

"No; I can manage. Go and change."

Rostov had to dress and return to the Cosmopolis by half-past eight, where he would have to dance and appear gay and debonair till midnight. He got through so many white shirts, and the *blanchisseuse* was a brigand and exacted blackmail for tearing your shirts to pieces. At twelve o'clock Mrs. De Quincy Evans would carry him off in her car, and he would eat, and in return for his food he would be expected to be gallant and amusing.

He went into the bedroom to change. Confound the old woman! Why couldn't she let him come to bed in peace? but must, with her carefully manicured fingers, tease the fibres of his youth.

He said:

"I have to go out to supper with the woman from whom I stole the peaches. Very boring. I think I shall tell her I'm married."

Vera's voice replied from the other room.

"Poor Michael."

"Oh, one has to put up with it. She gave me a hundred franc note after the show to-day. I performed with her party. I'll put the note on your dressing-table. Buy yourself something."

"Housekeeping, my dear. And some of it can go into the money-box."

"I leave it to you."

That particular evening proved to be just like other evenings so

far as Rostov was concerned, but Mrs. De Quincy Evans was different. She exhaled a perfume of property; and her smiles and intimacies suggested that Rostov was part of her property. She carried him off at midnight; in the car she patted his hand.

"You work very hard, my dear, too hard."

She was wearing a rope of pearls and a collection of exquisite rings, old rings picked up during her travels. Rostov had noticed them; they filled him at times with a savage bitterness; he believed that many of them were Russian rings wrung from hungry unfortunates. They arrived. Supper was laid, iced soup, a delicately dressed lobster, *béchamel* of chicken, a savoury, fruit. There was champagne; also a box of cigars. Mrs. Evans dismissed the manservant. Her peach-coloured face had a suave, persuasive expression.

And Rostov was conscious of something in the air. There was a part of him that began to bristle. Even the cigar she offered him was a ten franc bribe. And for what?

"My dear, have you noticed my rings?"

Oh, yes; he had noticed her rings.

"Madame has exquisite taste."

She nodded.

"It is my hobby. And at the same time I help people. Is it not true, my dear, that the Riviera is full of your unfortunate people?"

"Very true."

"And sometimes they need money, and they go to some Jew with a ring or a brooch or a necklace, and they have to take what the wretch will give. Even you — my dear — probably cherish some treasure."

Rostov's glance seemed to narrow. He was on the alert.

"Yes; that is true."

"And there are many refugees——"

"Yes."

"Well, my dear, I can offer you a profession. Together we might contrive to help your people and to please me. I presume you meet many Russians."

"Oh, yes."

"Well, my dear, why not bring them to me. You can act as my confidential agent. I am a very rich woman. I adore gems; they are my passion. But I am not a Jew. Rather — you could describe me

as a banker who buys securities. Now, wouldn't it be quite easy for you to go about and find people who had jewellery to sell, and bring them to me. It would be so nice and easy for them; no horrible haggling, no sneaking into shops."

Rostov's face was very pale.

"I see. You suggest, madame, that I explore Cap d'Or?"

"Not only Cap d'Or. But when I go to Monte Carlo or Nice or Cannes, or Paris or London, you follow me, my dear, and act as my agent. It will pay you better than giving dancing lessons. It might lead to — something."

She was very plausible, sitting there like a fairy godmother in a golden wig and with her cherry blossom face, but Rostov had one of those moments of illumination when a man knows things without being able to say how he knows them. Suddenly he knew her to be a succulent, greedy old woman, far worse than any of the Jews she spoke of, and he felt a chilliness up his spine; tremors of disgust. But he was the diplomat. He felt in the hip pocket of his trousers and brought out a little black leather case.

"Madame will excuse me."

He watched her face. He saw it sharpen and harden just as many women's faces grew hard and alert and greedy at the bridge table. Her pupils were pin-points.

"My last resource, madame. One must keep something in reserve. May I show it to you?"

"Of course."

He sprang the catch and raised the lid, and displayed to her a superb emerald in an old Italian setting. It had belonged to his mother. It was worth a great deal of money, and always he carried it about with him buttoned up in his hip pocket.

Mrs. De Quincy Evans' eyes caressed it, but she was astute, a good business woman.

"A pretty thing, madame. The emerald is perfect. Perhaps madame will value the ring for me."

She took it in her thick and stumpy fingers, held it up to the light, and examined the setting.

"Do you wish to sell it, my dear?"

"That might depend."

"Well, a hundred pounds — perhaps. There is a slight discol-

ouration——"

Rostov, deliberately and with grave politeness, recovered the ring from her pink palm, and returned it to the case.

"You hag," he thought; "the thing is worth five hundred if it is worth a penny."

He bowed to her.

"Madame will excuse me, but I do not sell. Nor am I tempted to be madame's agent, and help her to buy cheaply from poor devils who have just a little left. No; I have not yet fallen so low. I apologize for having permitted myself to eat madame's food and drink her wine."

But she had phlegm; she was not a sensitive sort of woman; she laughed, and got up on her stout legs, and made as though to box his ears.

"Don't be silly, my dear. Do you think I should buy that ring from you without having it valued by an expert? Don't be so dignified and silly. That's the worst of you people with half a mile of family tree behind you, you want everything taken at your own valuation. You want things done for you *en prince*. Don't be silly."

She pushed the cigar box towards him. She was jocund, soothing, maternal.

"Put half a dozen of those in your pocket, and don't quarrel with good business. I'm not a bad sort of woman. You would find me kinder than the management of the Cosmopolis. I am moving on to Cannes next month. If you have any sense of the value of things——"

His face looked narrow and old, his eyes sunk in his head.

"Madame, there are insuperable difficulties. You see—I am married; I have a wife in Cap d'Or."

The effect on her was instant, and obvious. Her pink face seemed to shrivel up like an apple that had been kept too long in a dry place. Her eyes lost their kindness.

"Indeed! How very superfluous. I suppose the management of the Cosmopolis considered a married man—less interesting. Bad business, marriage, my dear——? Isn't that so?"

He stood looking at her for one moment. He seemed to see her for what she was, a painted old woman with claws. He felt stifled. He wanted to get out of her damned villa.

He said:

"Madame is privileged. I have eaten her food. Sometimes one is hungry, but it is worse for a man when his wife is hungry. I will wish madame good night."

And he went.

Outside the night was calm and clear, and the mountains and the sea seemed to meet under the moon, the same old moon confronting yesterday and to-morrow, and he thought how damnable it was that people should be poor and hungry on such a night, and so much at the mercy of circumstance and of greedy old women. If only one could live on moonlight. Also, he had a feeling that he had made a fool of himself in allowing the cold, raw edge of his anger to show rather like the edge of a tattered shirt. He had insulted Mrs. De Quincy Evans, it would do him no good; it might do him a great deal of harm.

Climbing the four flights of stairs he found the little living-room in darkness. Vera had gone to bed. But she had left the bedroom door open, and the bedroom light on.

"Is that you, Michael?"

"It is."

"I'm so sorry, Michael — my headache — I'm afraid I am going to be ill."

He was shocked, frightened, touched, for her voice appealed; it was excusatory, humble, defensive. Almost she apologized to him for fearing she was going to be ill. It was a disaster. He found her lying on her back in the bed with her dark hair brushed out like a halo; her eyes excused herself:

"Don't be angry with me, Michael, I'm so sorry."

He bent down and kissed her.

"What is it — serious?"

He was frightened, but trying not to look so.

"It feels like 'flu, Michael. These wretched bodies of ours!"

During the week that followed the Cosmopolis and its various women wondered what was the matter with Rostov. He looked ill and exhausted. He danced like a man who was half asleep; he seemed to be stifling yawns; his eyes were frightened. The management had to complain, for Rostov was caught asleep in one of the lounge chairs at five o'clock in the afternoon when he should have

been dancing.

"This won't do, my lad. What's wrong?"

Rostov, startled, yet still half submerged, blurted out the truth to the spruce person.

"My wife's ill. I'm having to nurse her. I don't get much sleep."

"Haven't you got a nurse?"

"I can't afford a nurse."

The truth was out. The confession was overheard by four people who were playing bridge, and by two separate women who were reading novels. It spread. The Cosmopolis experienced one of those revelations of surprise and compassion. It discovered the humanity at the back of itself and of life in general and in particular.

"The poor lad! Falling asleep on his feet!"

It forgave him the concealment of matrimony; in fact it accepted his marriage, and made a personal affair of it. The hotel was moved.

Three gentlewomen formed themselves into a committee. They collected nearly five thousand francs. They asked the management to present the money to Rostov without giving the names of the donors.

When Rostov received the money his face became all shimmery and soft. He had to go into the cloakroom and pretend to brush his coat before facing the lights and the faces.

He found someone looking at him kindly, a woman who had looked at him less kindly a week ago.

"Mr. Rostov, how is your wife?"

He bowed stiffly; he was a little inarticulate.

"Better — thank you. It was pneumonia. People — people have been so kind."

"Might I go and see your wife? No; I won't tire her. I was very ill myself before I came down here."

So Vera had visitors. They managed to climb those four flights of stairs. They thought Vera Rostov "sweet," and said so. Also, they heard things about Michael, touching things. There was much more in the fellow than you would have suspected; he was not all dinner-jacket and patent-leather feet.

Said an influential lady to her influential husband:

"Really — those two young things — so pathetic. I wish you could do something, Bill."

Bill was buttoning his braces.

"I had a talk with the fellow. He's a good lad. I have been looking out for a chap to send abroad, or to travel with me, a fellow with languages and manners, a young fellow with some *nous* and breeding. I think I might do something."

"Do, Bill. You are always rather a dear."

Something was done.

Barron's Broken Head

JOHN BARRON WAS STANDING ON THE QUAI DE LA FRATERNITE' OF the old port of Marseilles. He had the Bourse and the Cannebiere behind him, and at his feet the dirty waters of the port embraced by the high old houses and carrying every sort of shabby craft, tramp steamers, launches, sailing ships. It was three o'clock on a January afternoon and the sun was shining. Trams clanged to and fro; motors clattered and hooted; the water blinked; a motor-boat full of tourists went scurrying out to visit the Château d'If; a swarthy fish-wench stood peeling an orange and throwing the yellow peel into the water. The place oozed with life, crawled with it — the strange, black, rather sinister life of a Mediterranean port.

Barron stood with his hands in his pockets and stared.

"Whither — and why?"

He had a most strange feeling as of standing naked on a cold beach, shivering yet indifferent. He was conscious of curiosity. Why had he come here? What was he going to do?

A most strange feeling this extraordinary indifference to life, especially as it concerned himself. For six months he had been possessed by the most profound boredom. It appeared that he had accomplished all that he wished to accomplish. He had been so successful that he had recoiled from success. He had talked of retiring from business; he had two young, energetic partners; his age was forty-seven; he was worth some fifty thousand pounds. He had a wife, two children, a pleasant place on the river.

And suddenly, dust and ashes!

There had seemed nothing left to be desired. Languor had descended on him. He had ceased to be interested in anything, in his wife, his children, his affairs, his golf. There had been mornings when he had felt overwhelmed by melancholy, not an active sadness, but a kind of gloomy indifference. He had been conscious of a queer sensation, as though a part of his brain had been

removed, the part that was concerned with the normal man's loves and hates and fears and ambitions.

Why had he come here? Where was he going? He did not know, and he did not care. Life seemed to have been cut in two. Or he was standing alone on the edge of some new world, feeling chilly and vaguely surprised and curious, just as though he had died and come to life in another world and had left his familiar self behind him.

Doctor's advice.

"Look here — my dear chap, you want a change. Go off by yourself for a couple of months."

He had taken his doctor's advice. It had been a push in a certain direction, and he had gone in that direction, passively, feeling somehow that both he and the doctor were fools playing some meaningless game.

His wife had seen him off at Victoria station.

Poor Kitty, she had tried to be so bright, and had looked worried. The impression of her worried and gentle face was the one impression that he seemed to have carried over across the curious gap between the now and the then. He remembered her standing and smiling at him through the window of the Pullman car as the train had moved off. There had been a quivering of her eyelids; her smile had broken suddenly; she had turned quickly away.

Poor Kitty, going a little grey, and with faint lines about her brown eyes! What had she to worry about? Him? There was nothing to worry about. Nothing was worth worrying about. He felt that he had a pad of ice in his head instead of a brain.

Here he was at Marseilles, and as free as any Monte Cristo. He could go to Cannes or Monte Carlo, or Corsica, or Algiers, or Tunis, or Egypt. He had only to decide. Yet — but decision was the one thing lacking. He did not care where he went; it did not matter — nothing mattered, not even poor Kitty's troubled face.

The swarthy girl had finished her orange. She spat out a couple of pips, wiped her mouth with the back of a hand, and looked happy. Her eyes lighted up Barron's dead face, and seemed amused by it.

"Buy an orange, Mr. Englishman."

She was hailed and smacked on both shoulders by two coal

grimed men who were passing.

"Hallo — Bam-Bam!"

She laughed and went along with them, and Barron turned his dead eyes towards the Cannebiere. He was still asking himself that question, but without feeling an urge to answer it. Whither? And why had his wife worn that worried look?

Yet to most women comes that crisis when the hand of her mate is withdrawn from hers. If she is wise she will hold her tongue and watch, wondering and waiting, however much her silence may hurt her. For a year or more Kitty Barron had watched the change that had been stealing over her husband. He had grown restless, bored, uninterested in the things that had always interested him. He had seemed to have no use for his garden. Noise had irritated him, the noise made by his own children. Always she had counted on his good temper and his kindness, and gradually both had failed her. He had become strange, aloof, very silent, with a dead look in his eyes that had made her afraid.

She had questioned the doctor, a rather too cheerful man who was in a perpetual hurry.

"I'm worried about my husband."

"Nothing radically wrong, Mrs. Barron. Physically, he is one of the soundest men — for his age — you would be likely to meet. Lost interest in things, has he?"

"Yes; nothing seems to interest him."

"Oh! a phase. Men get like that — sometimes. He told me he thought of retiring."

"He is too young to retire."

"Quite so. Let him have two months or so loafing about by himself, and he will come back as keen as ever. Sure of it. Active men get bored with being bored."

He spoke confidently. His advice was sound as far as it went — but how far did it go? Mrs. Barron doubted its completeness. Intuition is out of favour, but Kitty Barron divined more than did the doctor. Barron had never been a moody man. She and her husband were deeply attached to each other; their marriage had been a happy one. Then — gradually — this indifference had spread, a cold restlessness. What did it mean?

She had watched other marriages. She knew that men could be

incalculable creatures, as though the wild spirit of adventure possessed them suddenly, a nomad instinct, or insurgent sex, or a blind questing after something — they knew not what.

What did it mean in her husband's case?

She had let him go; she had tried to smile. Meanwhile she trembled, aware of a terrible insecurity, a wounded loneliness. She was afraid for him. Their two lives were so closely interlocked.

Meanwhile, on that January afternoon John Barron wandered up the Cannebiere, a listless man in the thick of a southern crowd. His plans were as vague as his movements, and so vague were they that he had left his luggage at the station. An hotel? Oh, he could loaf about and look at the hotels; there was plenty of time; when he had made his choice he could hire a taxi to the station, take his luggage out of the *consigne*, and return to the hotel in time for dinner.

A tout accosted him at the corner of the Cours Belsunce, a shabby fellow with shifty eyes.

"Want a guide, sir?"

Barron ignored the man, to be waylaid further on by a gentleman who proposed to sell him a pair of cheap opera-glasses, and who — when the Englishman declined the opera-glasses — produced from somewhere a packet of questionable postcards.

"Very nice, monsieur."

Barron shrugged him off. Confound these shabby fellows! He turned into a café, and sat down at one of the little tables behind the glass screen. A white-aproned waiter came forward. Barron ordered coffee. He lit a cigarette and watched the passing crowd, but his glances were dull as though he — a man under sentence of death — watched these live people who had ceased to matter.

He had been there less than a quarter of an hour when a woman came in and sat down at a table facing him. She was young. She was dressed in black and wore a red hat. The perfume with which she was scented seemed to fill the café. Her face, with its brilliant pallor, vermilion mouth, and large, dark pencilled eyes, made Barron think of a wax figure in a hairdresser's window. She ordered some strange drink, and opening her bag, produced a mirror, powder box and puff, and rouge stick. She appeared casually intent upon her complexion, and Barron watched her, not because he was

particularly interested, but as a man may watch a dog scratching himself.

A moment later her eyes met his. She gave him a long, considering, suggestive stare.

Barron glanced away; but later he looked at her again. There was something about her that piqued him. She was so different from any northern women; her rich artificiality seemed to him extraordinary; she looked as though made of white wax and black glass and red pigment. She made him think of some strange, exotic fruit.

And then he realized that she was smiling at him.

He sat up a little awkwardly in his chair. He took and lit another cigarette. The woman was looking in her little mirror and using her rouge stick. Her mouth did not seem to need it.

She glanced up quickly and met his eyes. She made a roguish little grimace.

Barron watched the smoke from his cigarette.

He realized that it was dark outside, and that the lamps were lit. It was about time that he selected his hotel. He was aware of the woman in the red hat getting up and going out. She paused at the glass door and glanced at him. He remained in his chair.

Five minutes later he went out, and was standing on the edge of the pavement when someone spoke to him. It was the woman in the red hat, and she spoke in English, though it was not very good English.

"You remember me. You here — in Marseilles — in the war. You — what they call 'red hat.'"

It was true. He felt vaguely interested and vaguely uncomfortable.

"I give hot coffee to Tommies. Remember? Tommies from India and Egypt and Palestine. Ah, it was great — the war."

He found himself walking beside her down towards the port. He was under no illusion as to the sort of woman she was, but he saw no harm in talking to her for five minutes, and he had not talked connectedly to a soul for three whole days. He felt a sudden desire to talk. Sudden memories of the war surged up in him.

"You live here?"

She smiled at him.

"Quartier St. Lambert, near the Fort St. Nicolas. You make holiday, hein?"

Yes; he was what she called making holiday, and he told her that he would have to turn back in a minute and hunt out an hotel.

"What — you have no hotel? You arrive to-day?"

"Yes."

"You funny man. Plenty hotel in Marseilles. I tell you good hotel."

She laughed. She seemed quite ready to allow him to assume that they were no more than a couple of casual people thrown casually together for five minutes, and exchanging casual words.

"You good boy — these days — *ne c'est pas!*"

She laughed and nodded her head at him. They were strolling along the Quai de Rive Neuve under the shadows of the high old warehouses, with the port lying on the right and the black bulk of small sailing ships and old tramp steamers. Piles of merchandise lay about, with lanes going down between the piles to the sleek black water. It was dark on the quay. Very few people seemed to be moving.

She slackened her pace.

"Ver — beautiful — Marseilles — at night."

He agreed.

"The lights. Like eyes — *hein!*"

She diverged towards the water and paused to look.

"Yes, ver beautiful. Come — see ——"

She strolled down casually between two dark piles of merchandise, and Barron followed her. Cases were stacked on either side; a black tarpaulin covered something. She was standing on the edge of the quay, looking across the water.

"Ver — beautiful. You think so?"

"I do."

He was feeling in his pocket for his cigarette case, and was looking at the thousand and one lights. He had his back to the narrow passage between the dumps of merchandise. It was very dark. And suddenly he had a feeling that he wanted to get away, back to those lights, and the safely crowded streets.

"Well, what about my hotel? Name one ——"

She glanced casually over her shoulder.

"The Hôtel Beau Soleil is ver good ——"

And that was all that Barron heard, for an arm swinging a lead weight stuffed into a stocking or a length of canvas, dealt him a

blow on the crown of his soft hat. The blow was almost silent, and so was his fall. He just crumpled up, and slid down into the darkness against a packing case.

Kitty Barron was more than worried. She was afraid. Ten days had elapsed, and she had not had a line from her husband; not so much as a picture-postcard. The boat-train had carried him off, and he had disappeared into complete silence. And it frightened her.

Almost her last words to him had been:

"Send me a few lines soon, Jack."

And he had promised. Always on those few occasions when they had been parted he had written to her regularly, and this new silence seemed part of his strangeness.

Where was he? Was he at sea, and unable to send her news? But then, at least, he could have scribbled a few words on a post-card before sailing. Still more days passed, and no word came from him. She felt helpless; there was no one to whom she could appeal; her husband had gone away on a holiday and had failed to write to her; that was all that she could say.

She called on their doctor.

"My husband has been away for a fortnight and I have not heard from him. It is very strange. He promised to write at once."

"Some men are very slack about letters, especially on holidays."

"But he isn't. You don't think he can have had a lapse of memory?"

"I found nothing to suggest it."

"But I cannot help feeling that something has happened?"

"But, dear lady, what could have happened? Besides, if anything had happened you would have heard. People don't vanish off the earth."

"Jack was not himself. Very depressed and strange. I know that you did not take a serious view——"

"My opinion was that your husband needed a break. He had got into a groove. I told him to laze about and forget everything for two months. You are sure to hear from him in a day or two."

But she did not hear; she became more frightened. She waited for every post, and no letter came.

At the beginning of the third week she went up to the town and

called on their family lawyer, an old friend. He heard what she had to say, and was carefully sympathetic, and tactfully curious. No quarrels, no misunderstandings? No. He did not ask whether there happened to be a woman anywhere.

"Sometimes a letter is posted and it does not arrive. Or it is put in a pocket and forgotten."

"I have thought of everything."

"And you are not satisfied?"

"I am frightened. I have a feeling that something has happened."

"You want me to do something? But you say that you don't know where he was going?"

"He had a ticket to Paris. After that — nothing. What can you do."

"I can get into touch with the police, and get them to communicate with the Continental police. It is all very vague. Would you like to wait a few more days?"

"No; please do something. I'm frightened."

In a ward of the general hospital at Marseilles lay a man who had been picked up on the quay by the police. The man — an Englishman by his looks — was still unconscious. No one knew anything about him. Passports, tickets, money, papers, all had gone. His linen was marked J. B. The hotels, Cook's, the Steamboat Offices had no information to give. From none of the hotels was any visitor missing.

The man was a problem both to the doctors and the police. His skull had been smashed, but there was no depression of the bone. He lay on his back, eyes closed, inert, tranquilly breathing.

The doctor in charge of the ward and a visiting surgeon consulted beside his bed.

"Something pressing there, a clot."

Obviously it was a case for the trephine. The surgeon decided to operate.

The operation was wholly successful, and John Barron was put back to bed with a neat little hole in his skull. A blood-clot had been found and removed. An ice-bag was applied to his dressed and shaven head; he was given morphia; they left him to sleep, and he slept for sixteen hours.

Quite early the following morning the nurse on duty heard what sounded like an altercation in the ward where the supposed Englishman lay. She went in to appease or to suppress, and found the Englishman sitting up in bed, feeling his head, and with his two neighbours also sitting up in bed. One was a sailor, the other an elderly clerk from a Marseilles store.

"What's this — what's this?"

Both the Frenchmen began to speak at once.

"Our friend here seems to have come to his senses——"

"He has been shouting at us——"

"Cursing. It had the sound of cursing."

"I tried to calm him, but he understands nothing of our language.'

The nurse gave her attention to the Englishman. He was holding his head, and looking about him as though searching for someone to explain the situation in which he found himself. He looked appealingly at the nurse.

"Where am I? Where the devil am I?"

She spoke soothingly, laying a hand on his shoulder, not understanding a word of what he said.

"Lie down; calm yourself."

He seemed to catch her meaning, and it increased his exasperation.

"Does anyone here speak English?"

"English. He wants to speak English," chirped the little old clerk. "Calm yourself, my dear fellow. Fetch Adolphe from over there. He is a waiter; he has been in London."

Adolphe, in *négligé*, was summoned, and stood at the foot of Barron's bed.

"What you want, sir?"

"Where am I?"

"In a hospital."

"Yes, yes; but where——? You are French."

"Naturally so, sir. This is Marseilles."

"Marseilles!"

"Certainly."

"But how did I get here?"

"In hospital, sir?"

"No — to Marseilles?"

The waiter shrugged.

"The police brought you here."

"The police! But I was in England."

"This is Marseilles——"

"Then I want to see the English consul."

To calm him the nurse promised that both the doctor in charge of the ward and the English consul should be sent for immediately. Moreover, the nurse slipped a sleeping-draught into Barron's early cup of weak coffee. Head cases should not be allowed to suffer excitement, and since neither the coffee nor the sleeping-draught made Barron sick he fell asleep again, and was still sleeping when the English consul came to question him.

They woke him.

"Here is the English consul, monsieur."

Barron's eyes expressed immense relief.

"My name's Barron. The last thing I remember is being in England. I wake up and find myself in a French hospital. Perhaps you can tell me how I came here."

"You were found lying unconscious on one of the quays."

"How long have I been here?"

"They tell me — about ten days. Obviously you had been knocked on the head and robbed. Your pockets were empty."

Barron looked bewildered.

"I don't remember. What was I doing here? The last thing I remember was cleaning my golf clubs — after a round — at home. Sitting by the library fire. My wife was there. Look here — can you wire for somebody to come out?"

"Of course, my dear chap."

"Wire to Fellows — my lawyer — Austin Friars, London. By the way, my wife must not know; she would be worried to death. Wire Fellows in confidence. My name is John Barron; I am a shipping-merchant; home address: 'River Lodge,' Walton-on-Thames."

The consul was making notes. He glanced with shrewd kindness at Barron.

"That's all right; don't worry. Just lie down and keep quiet. We'll settle all this. I'll send off a wire at once."

Three days later when Mr. Fellows reached Marseilles Barron was out of danger. They moved him to an hotel.

"But, my dear Fellows, what was I doing out here? That knock on the head seems to have wiped out every memory."

"You had gone away on a holiday."

"What for? All by myself."

"Doctor's orders."

"Doctor's orders? Why, I am perfectly fit; never felt more cheerful in my life. And I say — what about poor Kitty?"

"Rather worried; never had a word from you. She felt that something had happened. No one had the faintest idea where you were. We have found your luggage at the station."

"I'll write to her at once. Look here, when can I get home?"

"But you are on a holiday."

"Holiday be damned! I want to get back to work, and to Kitty and the youngsters. I want to go home."

"The doctor won't let you go just yet."

"Oh, very well, give me some paper. I want to write home. Wait a bit though, I had better send a wire. I'll pretend everything is all right. Thanks. How does this sound?

" 'Did you get my letters? Fit and well. Coming home soon. Love. — JACK.' "

Mr. Fellows stood smiling beside his bed.

"Yes, send it. You can explain — later. Funny places — these seaports. You must have been sandbagged and robbed the very day you arrived here. You had not even booked a room at an hotel."

Barron laughed.

"Well, of all the rum adventures! and I had to come away for my health — had I? What was supposed to be the matter?"

"Oh, you were a bit run down, depressed."

"Depressed! Why — I feel like a schoolboy itching to get home."

In three weeks Barron was back in England. He had a surprise for Kitty. He was in England before she knew that he had recrossed the Channel. He sent her a wire from Dover.

"Home for dinner — if you can make it 8.30. — JACK."

Three hours of suspense followed that moment of rich surprise. His letters from Marseilles had sounded very cheerful, but why was he spending all his time at Marseilles, and how was it that his

previous letters had gone astray? And what would she see in him, the old, happy comrade, or the moody, morose stranger of that dolorous winter?

She did not go to the station. She waited at home; she had sent the children to a friend's. She listened; she heard the taxi coming up the drive; she went to the door.

"Hallo! Kitty."

She was seized, held, kissed, while the taxi-driver dealt tactfully with the luggage.

"By Jove! it's good to be home."

She clung to him.

"Oh — Jack — oh, my dear man, it is good to have you home."

She held the man she knew, her mate, and not the heart-breaking stranger.

"You are better, Jack, your old self."

"Why, was I ever anything else?"

Later she had to hear his story. He could tell her no more than the police or the doctors knew. He must have gone for a stroll in the dusk, and been hit on the head and robbed while he was looking at the old port. He had been unconscious for days, and had been unable to remember anything of all that had happened for the last six months. It was extraordinary but it was true.

"Fellows came out to me. I told him not to let you know, Kitty. I did not want you worried."

She held him close.

"Oh — my dear — if you had been killed. I should never have known — perhaps ——"

"But they keep on telling me that I had gone away for my health. Depression. It sounds nonsensical. I never felt more fit or cheerful, dear old thing."

And that was the blessed fact that emerged from the adventure. That blackguard blow had opened a hole in Barron's head and let out the strange oppression that had weighed upon him. He had paid a biggish fee for that piece of scoundrel surgery, but someone realized that it had been worth it.

In the Snow

NORAH BURNSIDE WANDERED OUT INTO THE SNOW.

If life had been very smirked for her, this mountain world was virginal, all white and pure under the blue of the sky. The sunlight on the high peaks had the essential and beautiful cleanness of an unselfish thought. The stillness was supreme. In the white and muffled silence all sound seemed to have ceased, and so silent was this mountain world that she could fancy herself listening to the beating of her heart and the sound of her own breathing.

She took the path through the pinewoods where every tree had a crusting of snow. Her breath made a silver steaming, her skin tingled, and in her eyes there was a brightness. Higher, the pinewoods gave place to a sheet of virgin snow, in early spring a little upland meadow full of white and purple crocus, and on the crest of a slope someone had placed a seat. Moreover, someone had cleared the snow from the seat since last fall. She smiled as she thought of that someone.

"Poor man!"

She sat down. It was a day of suspense for her, and yet her suspense was not a mood of mist and of gloom, but it had the quality of this Swiss atmosphere, a sparkle, a tingling tenseness. She expected news, a letter, perhaps a telegram. She had waited months for this day, and the sun was shining, and she felt that the tragedy of her life lay cast off like so much evil vapour.

"Sun," she thought; "blessed sun. How old I was a year ago, and now——!"

Her face expressed a brooding gentleness. She looked up at the peaks shining against an infinite blueness, at the black woods with their snow mantles, at the sheet of pearly vapour that was a great canopy of cloud sealing up the lake that lay at the foot of the mountains.

She remembered that there was other life down there, and it seemed strange to her that it should be so. But why strange? He might have come to her from that other world, carried through the clouds in a little blue train that climbed up and up like some crawling insect.

The brown roof of the hotel was visible beyond the pines. It was no more than a glorified chalet into which some twenty people crowded, people who were not too well off, people who had been ill, people who were weary of the English gloom and who had climbed nearer to the sun. The life of the place was very simple, and as wholesome as the food. There was skiing, luging, skating on the flooded tennis court. The snow-field came right up to the deep verandah of the chalet, and you could sit on the verandah steps, put on your skis, and go gliding forth into the brilliant sunlight.

The skiers were out already. Norah could see five little brightly coloured figures climbing slantwise up the snow-covered hillside to the west of the hotel. They were moving streaks of red and orange and blue. Lower down someone in sober brown was trailing a luge.

But nearer across the snow a figure moved amid the crowded trunks of the pines. It come out into the sunlight, and paused there, gloved hands resting on the sticks, the figure of a very tall man in a yellow pull-over and brown breeches and stockings, and as long and as thin as the skis sunk in the snow.

Norah Burnside's dark lashes gave a little flicker. That he had followed her footsteps in the snow was obvious, as obvious as the ski track that led up to this seat. It was his seat and hers; he had brushed the snow from it with one of his big gauntlets.

Poor John Landon!

She was sorry for him, and perhaps she felt more sorry for him on this day when her heart was full of a happy suspense. Because something had happened to him since she had come to the Hôtel Vieux Châlet, something that might happen to any man who was fifty, and an exile, and very lonely. And perhaps he was one of the shyest creatures she had ever met, one of those big, gentle, diffident men, rather clumsy in his movements, and not a little inarticulate.

She had let him come near to her as a friend; she had talked to him as a friend, and he had seemed so absurdly grateful. Yes, and

he was more than grateful, but she was not afraid of that other homage; she had been touched by it and by its curious, shy magnanimity.

He came forward from the shadow of the pines, looking rather like a long and awkward bird trailing its feet over the snow. He was an ungraceful skier; he would never be anything else, and yet somehow it did not seem to matter.

He was smiling, but his smile was made and not meant. It was for her and not for himself. His blue eyes looked down at her, and yet there was a shyness in them that flinched. It was as though he found both pleasure and pain in looking at her, and chose both the pleasure and the pain.

It was she who broke the silence.

"Why aren't you with the others?"

He too glanced at those little moving streaks of colour on the white slope opposite.

"Do you think I ought to be? But I shall never be much good at this."

His thin face was a little twisted and whimsical.

"Those young things — a pace of their own. An old daddy-long-legs like I am ——"

She was observing the frayed cuff of his yellow pull-over. His clothes were rather shabby, not because he was doomed to shabbiness — but because — till a month ago — there had been no one for whose sake he had wished to bother. He was not bothering now — because she had told him.

She chose to be playful, for playfulness eases certain disharmonies, and there was something gallant in the way he managed to smile.

"I'm not such a very old thing ——"

His eyes were very wide for a moment.

"You! Hardly. I'm going up over the Razor Ridge. I suppose ——"

He looked at her feet. She was wearing snow boots, with a pair of socks turned over them.

"Too deep for me?"

"I don't think so."

She rose.

"How long will it take? You see ——"

Yes, he saw; he understood. Since yesterday she had been a free woman; she had shed her tragedy, and the law had made it final. And now she was waiting for her lover.

"Oh, less than an hour. We shall be back to lunch. You ought to learn to use these things. But, I dare say ——"

Her face seemed to catch the sunlight.

"I dare say I shall. He is rather an expert."

The blue eyes glanced at her quickly, and then fell away.

"He's coming out? I'm glad."

"Yes; any day. I'm expecting a telegram."

They went up the long slope together, he ponderously stepping, she with a lightness that seemed to defy the snow. Her face was slightly flushed, and her eyes happy, and their happiness hurt him, though he would not have taken her happiness from her.

And he was thinking of that other man who was coming to carry her away, back to England and a new life. She had a future, and he — John Landon — had no future save that of a homeless, womanless man, pottering along from hotel to hotel.

He envied that other fellow, though he did not even know his name. All that he did know was that Norah had divorced a cad of a husband — not for the sake of this other man — but because life had become a sordid and unbearable business. But the other fellow had been there in the background, a romantic shadow-man, a happy opportunist — and it appeared that she loved him.

"It might have been ——" he thought; and checked the impulse. For what was the use of dwelling upon lost possibilities? Moreover, they had reached the great white ridge of the divide, and reached it without exchanging twenty consecutive words. Another valley lay spread below them, a crumpled wilderness of snowy slopes and sombre woods, and beyond it rose other peaks.

He pointed with one of his sticks.

"See! Blion over there, rather higher than we are."

She stood at gaze.

"Is that Blion? It looks like one of those enchanted castles in a fairy tale, a glittering mystery upon a mountain."

"That's a good phrase! But the little turrets and spires — and all that mystery ——"

"Yes ——"

"Belong to the Palace Hotel."

He heard her happy laughter.

"Yes; but how romantic! Another playground in the snow. How far is it?"

"Not five miles. Our railway goes on there."

"We must go on there — some day."

A queer little smile seemed to wince across his thin face, for he knew that he was not included in the "we."

"Yes," he said; "of course you will."

When they turned to descend a restlessness seemed to seize him. She had the air of a woman eager to hurry back, because some message might have come for her, and her look of expectancy made him feel so much the superfluous and suffered friend. He broke away from her.

"I must do one glide. I'll join you again."

She watched him glide away on his skis. He gathered speed, and went swiftly and diagonally over the white slope until his tall figure became a thin and yellow streak. Her eyes had a kindness. She was not so absorbed in her own happiness as to be blind to his lack of it. Poor, lonely, exiled man! She saw him turn in the distance and strike back towards the track she was following, but he did not rejoin her until she had reached the pinewood, and under the trees his face looked overshadowed.

"It's like growing old," he said abruptly.

"The snow——?"

"You go up and so slowly; you reach the height — and then you come down with a rush. But it's of no consequence."

Outside the Vieux Châlet Hotel he remained to unfasten his skis. He could imagine Norah hurrying to the funny little box of a bureau where Madame sat busy with her accounts. "Anything for me, madame?" He left his skis on the verandah; he might need them again after lunch; there would be nothing else for him to do. But in the doorway he paused. He saw her standing in the red tiled passage with a piece of paper in her hands.

His inclination was to sneak away, but she raised her eyes and saw him. She smiled.

"I've had a wire. He's coming out."

Landon made himself answer her smile.

"Good. Coming here?"

"No — to Blion. Isn't it strange that we should have seen Blion this morning."

Landon's eyes were set in a stare.

"Blion ——?"

"Yes — you see —— It's rather sensitive and thoughtful of him — not to come here. At least — not ——"

Landon seemed to nod his head.

"Yes; I understand. But his train — the mountain train will pass here."

"So he says. It's such a long wire. He says he may arrive at some impossible hour, and that I'm to expect him when I see him."

She was folding up the telegram, and her downward glances were happy and pensive.

"Why — I have never told you his name, have I?"

"No."

"Philip Sherwood. But you'll be introduced. I want you two to be friends."

"Of course," said Landon, standing stiff as a post.

After lunch he put on his skis, and went out again over the snow, a lonely figure trailing its long legs over all that desolate whiteness. Never had he felt so alone with himself in a world that seemed empty and beautiful and still, as still as a world that was dead. He climbed again to the ridge, and saw a great red sun setting behind Blion, and the eastern slopes tinted with rose and gold, and the blue zenith flushed with soft light.

He stood and looked at the spires and the tourelles of Blion, and saw a little blue mountain train winding its way up the mountain track. Perhaps Sherwood was in that train? Rather decent of the fellow to go to Blion, and not to come thrusting himself straightway into the Old Châlet. It was the gentleman's touch. Naturally. He could not imagine any man behaving like a cad to Norah Burnside, and yet her husband had behaved like a cad to her. This Philip Sherwood was different — or she could not have cared. Oh, lucky lover, to have roused that look of happy expectancy in those soft, brown eyes!

He turned away from the sunset.

"You sentimental idiot!" he said to himself, and wondered

whether a man became a fool at fifty.

But was it folly to feel that you could give all that was good and clean in yourself to a woman like Norah? And if that was folly was not life a farce?

He let himself rush with a fierce swiftness through the cold, dry air, feeling that the sting of it was good. It seemed to brace up his spirit, and to enter into the very blood and marrow of his body. It was a challenge to his courage, and to the magnanimity that should come to a man when life has ceased to be a selfish scramble.

"Cannot one desire the good for others as well as for one's self?"

At dinner, sitting at his little table in a corner of the *salle-à-manger*, he looked across at Norah Burnside and tried to see in her the eternal woman breathed upon by the sacred spirit of life's mystery. She was wearing a dress of old rose colour, and round her throat a necklace of rose sapphires set in silver. She seemed to glow. Her whole figure had a soft brilliance. And in a strange, sad way he was glad, for her happiness had an ethereal beauty. It seemed to transcend material things; it was as exquisite as light upon a flower.

Afterwards he noticed that she kept for him a seat in the corner of the little lounge. The Châlet was a sociable place, and sometimes they would push back the tables in the *salle-à-manger*, turn on the gramophone and dance. They danced that night. The two Rendall girls and young Fisher, and a colonel man on leave from India made up the other couples.

Landon was a diffident dancer, and that night he was more shy and self-conscious than usual. Her happiness breathed so near to him, and yet it was not his, and perhaps to-morrow night or some night soon her lover would come. Almost he could feel the presence of that other man in the room.

Sitting out in the lounge between a fox-trot and a waltz and while the young things were trying steps in the dining-room, he sought to find out something to say to her, something that would not sound banal or foolish.

"We must have some dancing when Sherwood comes."

He thought the remark sufficiently idiotic when he had made it, but she accepted it like a naïf child.

"Would there be a train back to Blion?"

"I think so. The last one passes through here about half-past ten."

"So he could come down to dinner and get back."

"Easily."

Yes; how easy it all seemed for the other fellow! And then he asked her a question that was half intimate and half perfunctory.

"Haven't got a photo, have you?"

"Oh — yes."

"May I see it?"

"Of course."

She went up to her room and returned with a silver cigarette case in which she kept the picture of her lover.

"He's rather a dear."

And Landon sat studying the frank, and pleasant face of the man who was to be Norah's second husband.

"You are lucky — both of you — I should say."

"Thank you," she said.

In a mountain train that pulled up for a few seconds at the Old Châlet halt Sherwood himself stood at the doorway of one of the blue coaches and looked at the lights of the little hotel. He was passing it like a ship in the night, and when the train moved on he sat at his window and watched the chalet lights disappear. His eyes smiled. He was thinking of to-morrow, and of the manner of his coming to her. He would put on his skis and glide down from Blion over the snow. He would surprise her.

He sat in his corner seat and reflected. He had had a long journey and was tired.

"No need to hurry to-morrow. I'll spend the morning getting into form. It is two years since I had skis on. Then — in the afternoon — I'll swoop. She'll not be expecting me in that way. The unexpected's — always rather delightful."

Next day when the shutters were opened Norah looked out at an overcast sky. Coelestine had come in with the coffee.

"No sun, Coelestine?"

"It is going to snow, madame."

"Oh, what a pity! Do we want more snow?"

"What the good God sends us, madame, we receive."

The snow came. It was falling heavily before Norah had finished brushing her hair, a steady drift of big white flakes. The mountains were blotted out, and the pinewoods were grey and ghostly.

She was conscious of a feeling of disappointment and unrest. Going downstairs she found Landon in the lounge, sitting near a radiator, and reading yesterday's paper. He felt the cold.

"No skiing to-day."

He got up, offering her his chair.

"No — please ——" she protested.

"Yes; it's cosy by the radiator. We shall have to get out our jig-saw puzzles."

She looked a little anxiously out of one of the long windows.

"It won't stop the mountain trains?"

"No; not on this line."

Later she put on a raincoat and her snow boots, and trudged down to the little station and waited for the train that passed through at eleven o'clock. The train did not stop, for there were no passengers for the Vieux Châlet, and she looked at the windows of the coaches, but saw no lover's face. She met another train at three o'clock, and with no better fortune. She chided herself for feeling disappointed. Surely she was old enough to know that things happen when they happen?

As she walked back to the chalet the grey sky took on a silveriness. The snowflakes came less thickly, and she could see the dim peaks reappearing, and even a suggestion of blueness behind them. A light breeze sprang up, moving the snow-laden branches of the pines.

"To-morrow the sun will shine," she thought, and went in to take off her snow boots.

She had tea in the lounge with Landon, and the two Rendall girls, and the colonel. The colonel, very much on leave, was teasing everybody, and trying to spread very cold butter on very dry toast. His knife made a scraping sound.

"Hallo! here's the sun."

It broke through just before sunset, and the light streamed in at the long windows. Norah got up to look at the great red sphere hanging above the white hills, and tinting the snow and the clouds with an almost miraculous radiance. She found Landon standing beside her. His thin face seemed to catch the light, and she thought how old and sad he looked.

"Wonderful, isn't it?"

His blue eyes stared straight at the sun.

"A fine day to-morrow."

Landon had a bedroom with two windows; one facing south, the other looking west towards the pinewoods and the great white slopes beyond them. He had undressed, and was about to turn off the light when it seemed to him that he heard some sound coming to him out of the night.

He stood and listened, his fingers on the switch, and again he seemed to hear that cry, faint and almost undistinguishable. He slipped into his dressing-gown, and going to the south window, opened it, and pushed back a shutter. The cold of the mountain night seemed to meet him like a sheet of icy glass. It was a windless and brittle cold. It made him cough slightly; but he managed to stifle the cough. He stood and listened. But not a sound came to him out of that white and frozen world.

"Must have imagined it," he thought; "nobody would be out there at this hour."

When he woke next morning the sun was shining, for he had left the shutters a-jar, and a shaft of light streamed in. He got up and threw open the shutters, and saw a brilliant, white world, and a sky of cloudless blue, but the very beauty and the promise of the day provoked him to restlessness. It made him think of lovers, and of the youth of the world, and of all his lost moments.

He dressed and rang for his coffee and rolls. He decided that he would get away and out into the sunlight and the snow before the rest of the hotel came down to take its pleasure. He would go out alone, a long way, further than he had ever been before.

The lounge was empty when he went downstairs. He took his skis from the little room opening from the verandah where the luges and the skis were stored. He set out across a world of deepened snow, bearing towards the pinewoods whose boughs were more white than ever. He had reached the edge of the wood, and the shadows of the first scattered trees were patterning the snow, when he saw something, a figure, a face, a blue shape prone upon the snow. Involuntarily he stood still, staring, as rigid and motionless as the trees.

For there, in a patch of sunlight, a man lay with his chin resting on his crossed arms, his widely open eyes looking down towards the Old Châlet, yet to Landon the figure had an unnatural stillness.

He was conscious of a sense of impending horror.

"Hallo——!"

His own voice sounded cracked and harsh, and he felt a coldness down his spine, for those motionless eyes continued to watch the chalet. The figure made no movement.

Landon ploughed forward on his skis. The still face resting above the crossed arms seemed strangely familiar, and then he realized. Sherwood! Her lover!

He found himself bending down to touch the man, and when he had touched him he withdrew his hand sharply with a little gasping cry.

"My God——!"

For Sherwood was stiff as ice, a dead man staring with dead eyes at the chalet.

Landon's face looked all lined and yellow. He seemed to sag at the knees, and then the force of his manhood returned. How had the thing happened? This horrible and tragic thing! And then he saw that one of Sherwood's legs looked all twisted, and that there was a piteous track in the snow.

Landon followed that track. It took him through the pine wood and up the white hillside, and there it ended in a flurry of snow, and a black boss of rock sticking up. Sherwood's skis and sticks were lying here.

The picture was complete. Sherwood had struck this treacherous piece of stone, and had broken a leg. He had taken off his skis and tried to crawl down to the Old Châlet, but at the edge of the pine wood exhaustion and the cold had beaten him. He had shouted and no help had come. He had lain there, died there, with his eyes looking at the lights of the chalet.

"My God!" said Landon; "my God!"

He slouched back clumsily on his skis to where the dead man was lying. He stood there for a moment with a grey and pitying face. She would have to be told. And he would have to tell her.

Laughing Sickness

GOLDBERG HAD LET US DOWN.

He was a man of whims, and since he could afford to be whimsical and had written each of us a comfortable cheque we had nothing serious to complain of. Goldberg's hobby was entomology. He had spent six months in organizing an expedition into Pongoland; he had transported us all to Bimbasa, and then — one night after dinner at the Imperial Club — he had suddenly announced that the whole adventure was cancelled. He had given us no reasons; he had said that he was going home.

Mainprice and I stayed on at Bimbasa. We put up at Latters Hotel. Mainprice, who was a sort of scientific super-man, and who flattered himself on his facial resemblance to Huxley, talked of undertaking some research on his own.

"Plenty for me to do here, you know, Vereker. I suppose you will be going back to England."

I did not like Mainprice. He was too complacent, too learned, and too sarcastic. He was a zoologist, and a palæontologist, and also I thought a majestic prig. I was just an ordinary doctor-man, with some knowledge of bacteriology; but Mainprice treated me as though I were a raw student. There were occasions when I lusted to kick him.

I told him that I was in no hurry to go home.

"Hill suggested I might stop out here. There is an opening, and it is a fine life and a fine climate."

Mainprice looked at me with one of his super-wise smirks.

"I see."

I think we both knew why Bimbasa held us, for we were interested in the same woman. Goldberg had taken us out to visit Geoffry Hill's house and plantation on Table Keep. Hill was a delightful person, and he had a daughter, a tall, slim, long-limbed young woman who moved as though life were a dance. The flick

of her ankles, and the way she moved her feet had made a boy of me.

And I had a right to be a boy, but it had seemed to me that Mainprice had no excuse for being interested in her. Mary Hill was alive; she wasn't an ology, or a thing to be pinned out and labelled, or to be made love to by this rather simian and superior person.

I made it my business to get in his way. And I must say that he responded. We were always riding up to Table Keep, and sitting in the big white loggia, and trying to make fierce but polite fun of each other while Mary gave us tea.

She was a most vital person. To see her on a horse was a delight. Her brown eyes were both bright and soft like the eyes of a bird. She was charming to both of us in her easy, happy way. She showed no preference, and there was a time when I doubted whether she took either of us very seriously. She was devoted to her father, and he deserved it.

The absurd part of it was that Mainprice and I always rode up together and came away together. People might have taken us for two cronies, but I know now that he hated my cheerful brown face, and I know that I hated his monkey one.

It all happened on the night when Hill asked us to dinner. Mainprice and I met in the lounge of "Latters," and when he saw that I was dressed his eyes seemed to snap at me.

"Of course!" they said.

At Table Keep we found a tired and raw-boned looking man lying in a long chair in the loggia and talking to the Hills. His name was Bland. He moved heavily and held out a thin hand when we were introduced to him.

"I have heard about you two," he said. "Well, if you came out here to be scientific, I think I could find you a job."

He laughed; but directly he heard his own laughter he seemed to straighten up with a jerk, and his face went all twisted. There was something queer about him. He looked like a man who had been badly frightened.

"I was only joking," he said.

Hill explained, and while her father was speaking Mary joined us.

"Bland has been shooting and prospecting. Some mandarin down at Bimbasa asked him to try and find out if there is any truth in a

wild rumour that has been coming down to us here. The Loma country. A new sort of disease, wiping out whole villages."

We looked at Bland, and it seemed to me that he was keeping his face rigid. It was Mainprice who began to ask questions.

"What sort of disease?"

"The natives call it 'Laughing Sickness.'"

"It sounds a merry sort of disease."

"Man, it's a horror! What the thing is I don't know. I suppose it is due to some beast of a bug. You start with a temperature and a slight rash, and then you begin to laugh in bursts and spasms, and you go on laughing till you die."

I don't think Mainprice believed him.

"Is this a yarn, or have you seen it?"

"Man, have I not! A village full of skeletons laughing in the moonlight. Just like hyenas and the rattling of bones."

We went in to dinner, and I believe that Bland would have preferred to let the subject drop, but Mainprice would not allow it to be dropped. We were sitting opposite each other, I on Mary's right, he on her left. I could see that Mainprice was annoyed, for she had asked me to take her in to dinner.

He kept looking across at me while he dragged more information out of Bland. His eyes had an ironical hardness, and I began to feel that he had something at the back of his mind.

"The disease is highly infectious, I suppose?"

"Well, it has wiped out whole communities."

"Is it confined to the natives?"

"I can't say," and Bland smiled a queer sort of smile. "I did not stay long enough. One wouldn't unless one was obliged."

Mainprice looked across at me.

"What about it, Vereker? Isn't the doctor in you interested?"

"Naturally."

"The scientific sleuth on the track of a new disease. What a chance for you to make your name."

He was an uncomfortable person was Mainprice, and I was wondering what to say to him when Mary interposed.

"It seems to interest you, Mr. Mainprice — this disease."

"Of course it does, Miss Hill. We came out here to explore and to collect, and we have done nothing — absolutely nothing. And

here is a problem, one of those problems that a white man feels it his duty to tackle."

His eyes were on me, and his sententious heroics were aimed at my head.

I turned to Bland.

"How far up country is the district where 'Laughing Sickness' originated?"

Bland hesitated, looking at me with kind eyes.

"Oh, about five hundred miles. The Loma country. Scattered villages in the forest country on the edge of the hills."

"Is it easy to get there?"

"Perfectly easy for three hundred miles, and then you would have to take porters, and a guide. You might manage with horses. I don't know."

I heard Mary's voice, and when I glanced at her I found that her eyes were on Mainprice.

"If you are so interested, Mr. Mainprice——"

He took up the challenge and passed it on to me.

"Certainly; I'll go, like a shot. But I am not a doctor, though I am something of a bacteriologist. If Vereker would join me—I think it is up to us, you know."

I felt that he had been playing for this very point, but my decision was obvious.

"Quite; I'm ready to go. I can fit up a little travelling 'lab.' Instead of hunting insects we can hunt out the cause of this beastly disease."

Mainprice smiled at me.

"Good man, Vereker. I knew you were not the sort of chap to hang back."

Hill looked grave, but there was nothing that he could say against the enterprise, though it had originated in his house. After all we were the very men to attack such a problem, and as Mainprice had said—"It was up to us." Bland sat and gloomed, and Mary said nothing, but before the evening was over she spoke words that I was not likely to forget.

We were standing alone at the end of the loggia, watching the moonlight shining upon the Bimbasa valley.

"Jim—must you go?"

I held my breath.

"Of course. It's a point of honour."

"But — he ——"

"I know. That's why ——"

We both of us felt someone behind us, and we turned and found Mainprice there. He must have walked like a cat over the matting.

He held out a hand and smiled.

"Good night, Miss Hill. I will take great care of Vereker."

We went off together, and as we rode out of the gate I caught him looking at me and I knew that he had heard what Mary Hill had said.

From the very beginning of the adventure I knew that Mainprice and I were at war, and that the test between us was to be one of courage and endurance. We were polite to each other; we discussed all the details of the business with scientific thoroughness, but behind this superficial friendliness hatred stood on guard.

I have often wondered whether two men have ever started out to tackle a rather deadly enterprise as Mainprice and I set out to explore the terrors of this curious disease. Each was daring the other to drink poison or to hold a hand over the flame of the candle of death.

We took train to Kirodi, and fitted out our little expedition there. Our party consisted of a half-breed Arab interpreter named Ali whom we christened "Slim," six Logi porters, two Nagra "boys," and half a dozen ponies.

Ali knew the Loma country. We had to bribe him heavily in order to persuade him to go with us, and the beggar asked for half his pay in advance. The "boys" and the porters were not in the secret, for the fear of "Laughing Sickness" had begun to spread, and rumour is a thing of terror. Our equipment was of the lightest, and it included a couple of light tents. Mainprice and I were armed.

During that three weeks trek to the Loma country Mainprice and I kept up the illusion of a mutual interest in our adventure. There were times when the illusion almost ceased to be an illusion, and I think we came near to forgetting our feud in the keenness of our curiosity.

Mainprice surprised me. I had thought of him as an arm-chair man, and incapable of roughing it, but I found that there was more

of the healthy savage in him than I had believed. He was hard. Also I discovered in him a touch of brutality. He was ready to use a whip on the Logi men, and Ali had to warn him that the blacks would bolt if he handled them too roughly.

Yet, all the while, I was conscious of watching Mainprice, and of being watched by him.

It was evening when we touched the Loma country. We had had an eventless passage, and none of our men seemed to suspect what our purpose was, but they were wiser than we knew.

We off-saddled and pitched our camp on some high ground, covered with scattered trees. A red sky flared over what looked to be a wooded plain, very dark and vague under the sunset. The Logi men were lighting a fire, for one of them had seen the "pug" of a lion. Ali and our "boys" were preparing supper.

Mainprice and I sat down under a tree and looked at the swarthy plain below us. It was growing dim and mysterious. The air had a slight tang like the air of an autumn evening in England.

Mainprice spoke, his arms over his knees.

"Noticed anything lately?"

I had.

"For the last three days we haven't seen anything human."

"Exactly."

Hardly had he uttered the word when a sound came up to us from the darkening country below, laughter, queer solitary laughter like the barking of a solitary jackal. A tremor went through me.

"Hear that?"

He gave me a strange look.

"Rattled? Listen——!"

For that solitary laughter had provoked a weird outburst of false mirth. It was like the spasmodic coughing of a crowd of "gassed" men during the war, but far more horrible because of the mockery of its mirth.

I glanced over my shoulder. The chatter about the camp fire had ceased, and I saw our men standing like so many polished black marble statues. The whites of their eyes gleamed. There was fear in them.

Mainprice was smiling.

"We are in luck. Tumbled right on it."

His smirk annoyed me, for he seemed less scared than I felt.

"Just look over your shoulder," I said.

He looked and saw the blacks.

"If we are not careful we shan't have a 'boy' within twenty miles of us to-morrow morning."

He pretended to be patronizing.

"Don't get windy, Vereker. I'll get Ali to tell the fellows that they can sit tight here, and that we shall not expect them to go any farther."

I was feeling hot about the ears.

"After supper," I said, "we might go down — there. A full moon. I expect there is a village."

He nodded his head at me.

"Right you are. I'm game."

We went, after cautioning Ali to keep an eye on the men and to allay any alarm that might have developed in their thick heads. A full moon was swimming up over a silent world, silent so far as men were concerned, for the night cries of the wild creatures were beginning. And then, half-way down the slope of the hill we heard laughter, sudden and weird, and a whole chorus of it broke out upon us.

We came to the village. It had a ditch and a hedge of thorns, but we found one of the rude gates open. We stood there looking in. There was a square space between the huts, and the full moon showed us the figures of men and women. Some lay flat; others were sitting up; others had their heads on their crossed arms and bent knees, and when we first came to the gate they were silent.

Suddenly one of the seated figures threw up its head and began to laugh, wild spasmodic laughter, and it seemed to provoke the same spasm in the others. Some writhed on the ground and laughed; others, supporting themselves on their arms laughed at the face of the moon. I think it was the most unearthly sound I have ever heard, the laughter of these doomed people who had dragged themselves out into the open to die.

Mainprice expectorated.

"Good Lord!" he said, "I suppose the ones who could run bolted into the bush — and left these —— It will come to the same thing."

His fear was edged with disgust. He looked me full in the eyes.

We were afraid, but we fought our fear, because each feared to show fear before the other.

"Like to take their temperatures, Vereker?"

The ironical beast in him sneered.

"I'll do it in the morning. Daylight."

"Quite so. We'll investigate by daylight."

We retraced our steps towards our camp fire. It looked like a flame-coloured flower, and the flames were the petals. Our two white tents showed up dimly as we approached, and we were within twenty yards of them when we became aware of a sort of emptiness. Not a figure moved. We shouted to Ali, and when the silence gave back no answering voice we realized what had happened.

Our blacks had bolted.

We made a rush for the fire. Four of the six ponies were still tethered under a tree. Pack-saddles, cases, and sacks lay around. We turned them over, searching like men who knew the urgency of the issue.

"The damned fools!" said Mainprice, but with a gulp of relief.

They had left us food. My two medical panniers were untouched. We had our tents and our rifles. Even in their terror the blacks had shown a sense of sportsmanship.

Mainprice and I looked at each other.

"Well, we are for it, Vereker. Are we going to see it through?"

I saw that ironical smirk of his.

"I'm game," I said.

He laughed, and then checked himself.

"Well, perhaps one of us will go back. It will depend——"

He gave a shrug.

"It will depend, my dear Vereker, upon who begins laughing first like one of those poor brutes down yonder."

I think we accepted that chance, tacitly and with obstinate enmity. If one of us were to break into that deadly laughter, then the other was to be considered free to take two of the ponies and try his luck in a lone attempt to reach Kirodi.

For seven days we worked and watched each other. Our hatred was such that we did not spare ourselves, but went about among those poor, dying, laughing blacks, doing what we could for them, and trying to get some notion of the nature of the disease. One

would have thought that the work would have brought us together, but instead of that it set us further apart.

I had my moments of fear and of horror, but I beat them back. I tried to think steadily of Mary Hill and of all the charm and wholesomeness of the house on Table Keep. I worked as I had worked sometimes during the war, smoking innumerable pipes, and eating like a savage.

Mainprice was a pretty good microscopist, and we spent hours making blood films and staining them, and examing them in my tent. We tested the sick people's secretions, searched the huts and clothing, examined the water, kept alert eyes on every sort of fly and insect.

Mainprice would have it that the disease was fly borne.

"It can't be in the food or the water — or it would have happened long ago. Some particular insect has developed a sudden taste for man, and the germ of the disease must be planted by the bite."

I was inclined to agree with him.

We had begun to notice a peculiar species of hover-fly with a blotch of red on its body and peculiarly iridescent wings, and one evening while we were sitting outside the tents I heard Mainprice utter an exclamation and strike the flat of one hand against the back of the other.

"Damn! I've been bitten."

He had killed the fly and while he searched for it in the grass, I sat and wondered.

"One of those flies we have noticed."

His voice was casual, but I knew that he was afraid. And so was I. That night in my tent I rubbed myself with carbolic oil. If the smell of it would keep the particular, deadly fly at a distance — well — I might live to see ——

Three tense days followed. Mainprice was worried about the bite of that fly, and he grew more irritable and suspicious; I felt him watching me; at night he was restless, and I could hear him moving in his tent. We took turns at keeping the fire burning, and as though he grudged me my sleep he would make a great noise over throwing on fresh wood, but it may have been that noise soothed the fear in him.

On the fourth day I thought he looked flushed; and his eyes

were infected; but he said nothing and carried on with the work.

At tea that day I happened to slop some boiling water from the kettle on to my trousers. It hurt me and I swore, and Mainprice began to laugh. It seemed a silly sort of joke to me, but it amused him.

"Oh, shut up," I said.

But Mainprice went on laughing. I stared at him; I felt like throwing the kettle at his head, and then — suddenly — I understood. Mainprice could not stop making that absurd noise; "Laughing Sickness" had him.

Presently, the spasm passed. He sat gasping, looking at me with turgid eyes that were full of indescribable things.

"I've got it. It must have been that damned fly. Well — that's that."

He grinned.

"Suppose you will be making tracks for home. That was the understanding — eh?"

I felt grim. For I had begun to realize that whatever my hatred of Mainprice might be I could not leave the fellow alone to die.

"I'm staying," I said.

And then he cursed me.

"You silly, schoolboy storybook hero. Do you think I want your slobbering magnanimity. Get out. I'm not afraid of dying."

"I am," I said; "but I am going to stay."

With the horror of the thing on me I went down to the village where the silence had deepened day by day. Only an occasional strange and feeble chuckle came from the place, for the disease had done its work; an old man and a young girl still lived — but they were dying.

I sat down on a tree stump near the gate.

What was I going to do?

Run away or stick by the man I hated?

Mainprice would despise me if I ran away, and if Mary Hill were to know she too would think me a despicable cur.

No; I had got to stay and see it through.

The sun was setting when I began to re-climb the hill towards the two white tents and the fire. An intense melancholy had attacked me, and I was trying to fight it off. I was not thinking of

Mainprice for the moment but of Table Keep——

Crack!

My hat flew in the air, and something scorched my scalp. My arms went up; and then, instinctively, I threw myself forward and lay still. Up there I had had a vision of Mainprice lying prone, a smirk on his face, the rifle to his shoulder.

I did not move. I was wondering whether he would feel sure that he had got me, or whether he would come down the hill. I had my revolver, and if he came I meant to use it.

I heard a second report, but no bullet came my way. The sound had seemed duller, muffled.

But I lay still. The sun went down, and presently I began to crawl up towards the fire. I should have Mainprice at a disadvantage, for if he stayed by the fire when the darkness fell I should be able to see him, while he would not see me.

Again I waited.

It was very dark now, and I crawled on. There was no sound, and raising my head and holding my revolver ready, I took a steady look.

Something lay near the fire, a shape, and a moment later I understood. That second shot had not been for me.

I buried Mainprice that night, and when the dawn came I fled, leaving the tents and the equipment, and taking food and the two ponies. I wandered for a month, and it was a month of horror, for every moment of the day I was listening for the sound of my own laughter.

Sometimes I made myself laugh, just to see whether I could control it.

It was on the morning of the thirty-second day that I met the first native. I could not speak his lingo, and he had no English.

"Kirodi."

I kept repeating the name of the place and making signs to him. I showed him money and he understood. I was within thirty miles of Kirodi and did not know it. The black took me there.

There was an English doctor at Kirodi. I stayed outside the place and sent for him, and when he came I told him the whole tale.

"I don't know the incubation period of this damned disease, but

I have been free for over a month. But you had better quarantine me."

He did. For a month I lived in a tent on a hill above Kirodi, with a couple of black police patrolling the neighbourhood. At the end of the month the doctor brought up the Local Commissioner, and I had to make a statement. I showed him the hole in my sun hat.

"If you send out a search party," I said, "you will find Mainprice buried, with the top of his head blown off. He must have put the muzzle of his gun into his mouth. But is it necessary? Can't the dead be left — to sleep — untroubled?"

The Commissioner was a white man.

"My dear chap, I'll think it over."

The doctor had wired to the Hills. I was wondering when I should see them, and what I should say to Mary.

But it was Mary who came to me.

The Man with the Red Tie

KITTY SAUMAREZ HAD BEEN ILL.

A London flat in Vandyke Place may be all very well when there is a tinge of blue in the sky and the plane trees are in leaf; but in November, with the rain coming down in a grey sheet, or fog stagnant like a solution of dirty cotton-wool outside your window, the situation is less encouraging. Kitty lay and looked at the wet chimney pots and the swaying and groping plane branches, and listened to the wind. She felt that getting up was not worth while.

Her mother understood more of these things.

"My dear, you will feel better for getting up. You must make an effort."

"I feel so weak still."

"Of course, you will feel weak. You will continue to feel weak until you make an effort."

Mrs. Saumarez was a little, dried-up slip of a woman with a pale mouth and alert blue eyes. She wore rimless pince-nez. She had the kind of hand that is apt to resemble a claw: thin and sinewy, with the fingers curved inwards.

Kitty shed tears. They were perfectly absurd tears, such as are wept on dreary occasions when people feel weak and hopeless, and some little tragedy lies at the back of the mind.

"My dear, don't be ridiculous. You are old enough——"

The tears still trickled.

"You must really pull yourself together. It isn't as if you hadn't everything—all the comforts——"

"Mother, please, I'm too tired to talk."

Mrs. Saumarez went out of the room with the air of leaving a moody child to the persuasions of loneliness. It had sometimes occurred to Mrs. Saumarez that Kitty was unfortunately like her father, that husband whom Mrs. Saumarez had divorced twenty

years ago, and never heard of since.

It was always supposed that Roger Saumarez had gone to Samoa or Hawaii or Borneo, anywhere that was queer and impossible and a little adventurous. Also, it was presumed that Roger Saumarez was dead.

It is possible to have everything and nothing, and Kitty was in that unhappy state. She had a home, a highly moral mother, no possible financial worries, an allowance of a hundred a year. Moreover, a little illness and the subsequent convalescence may be full of pleasant snugglings and spoilings if the people about you are comfortable and sympathetic. No one had ever called Mrs. Saumarez a sympathetic woman, and Kitty had had a rather disastrous little love affair.

The man had behaved very badly.

"But then, my dear Kitty, you must not expect too much from men."

Mrs. Saumarez had helped to cure her daughter of a perfectly absurd romanticism. Her father had been romantic. It was impossible to do anything with romantic people. Romance was just male beastliness dressed up in Tennysonian verse. Mrs. Saumarez did not understand that her daughter had suffered humiliation; she should have understood it, because Roger Saumarez was supposed to have behaved very badly, but Blanche Saumarez had not felt humiliation. She had that sort of cold complacency that may be offended but is never ashamed.

Kitty's doctor was more sympathetic.

"You want a little sunshine. What about a change?"

"I don't feel that I can bother."

"Oh, yes you can. I'll speak to your mother——"

He had paused at the door, and looking back at her he gathered the impression that Kitty was trying to say something to him.

"Well——?"

"If—I—could go away alone."

"Or with friends—the right kind of people?"

"Yes."

He understood that Kitty did not want to go away with her mother.

Dr. Beal put it to Mrs. Saumarez that her daughter needed a

change, and Mrs. Saumarez — being a changeless woman — suggested a fortnight at Eastbourne. Mrs. Saumarez liked Eastbourne, therefore it was quite the sort of place for her daughter to convalesce in.

Dr. Beal tactfully applauded the charms of Eastbourne, and then went on to explain that he would prefer to prescribe a month abroad, somewhere in the sunshine. Eastbourne was all very well in the summer, but those bleak, grey downs seemed to make England seem even greyer than it was.

"But I don't go abroad," said Mrs. Saumarez; "I don't like going abroad."

"Perhaps you have friends whom your daughter could join?"

"By herself?"

"Well, why not?"

"But — the expense?"

"Believe me — you may find it less expensive in the end than doctor's bills."

Dr. Beal was a humourist, but you had to be very careful how your humour comported itself in Mrs. Saumarez's presence. You could not allow it to Charleston. It had to be correct and straight in the leg.

"I'll think about it."

But it so happened that Clare Jobson brought the necessary chance and powers of persuasion to tea at the Saumarez flat. Mrs. Jobson was all that Mrs. Saumarez was not; but Mrs. Saumarez allowed her a social relationship because the Jobsons were impeccably nice people. The Jobsons were going to Beaulieu for three months; they were renting a villa there.

"Do let Kitty come out for a month. It would be so nice for Jean."

Kitty's eyes were grateful and imploring.

"Oh — I'd love to go."

Her mother looked all round and through the proposition. She did not quite approve of the Riviera. Never having been there she thought it decadent and *nouveau riche*. But then — the Jobsons were nice people, and if this was an invitation to stay, there would be no hotel bills.

"It is very kind of you ——"

"Do let her come —— But of course — you will."

And Mrs. Saumarez was persuaded.

Just what Beaulieu meant to Kitty Saumarez, would not be easily explained. She could not quite explain it to herself; she did not know what she wanted and what she did not want. Her attitude towards life was a shrinking from it rather than a going out to meet it, for she had gone out to meet it as it had appeared to her in the person of a very modern young cub who had not found the sex in her sufficiently accommodating. In these days it was necessary to be accommodating, to be able to look a man straight in the eyes with the boldness of the professional, and Kitty was most unbold.

But here were sunlight and blue sea. The Jobsons' villa was on the way to Cap Ferrat. It had a garden. The Jobsons were kind people, and Kitty's window had been kindly chosen, for it caught the morning sunlight, and showed her a blueness of sea and sky and all that mountainous coast stretching towards Italy. The Jobsons did not fuss her. Jean was a tall, fair-haired, serene young person who patronized the male, and was rather inclined to despise the youthful variety.

"Just let her sit in the sun. Let her get her breath back. She's been frightened."

So said Clara Jobson.

"I'd like to have a word with young Darcy."

So said the daughter.

"The young Darcys are not worth while. When a girl is old-fashioned and romantic——"

"Romantic! Romantic about the modern lad! Great snakes——! And then—of course—the old woman——"

"Jean, my dear, I appreciate the modern touch, but isn't it a little unsubtle, a frenzy of feet—like your new dance?"

Jean smiled.

"Oh, we are not—all of us—quite so crude as that. But Mrs. Saumarez——! I'm not surprised old Saumarez ran away—— Jolly sensible of him—I should say."

But they allowed Kitty to sit in the sun, and to wander along the path to St. Jean, and to go as far as the cape where the Virgin holds the Child beside the old grey tower. Kitty liked to sit by the sea. The sea was impersonal. It did not ask her for anything, or

clutch at her, or expect her to behave like a young animal. There was nothing of the male in it. She shrank from the young male; she was not accommodating. She felt drawn towards older people. Beaulieu might be full of artifice, but also it was full of older people. Young men were scarce. And just at present young men made her shudder.

Jean played tennis at the Bristol club. Kitty preferred to sit in the gardens of the Aux des Fourmis and listen to the Bristol orchestra playing on the terrace. She had a favourite seat there; sheltered, yet in the sun, with the perfume of the wallflowers and the stocks floating to her. There was no need to shrink from music and from flowers.

Also, it appeared to be the favourite seat of a picturesque old man who wore a white flannel suit, and a red tie and a panama hat with a biggish brim to it.

Kitty had observed him in and about Beaulieu. He was observable. He had white hair, and a high colour, and an aquiline nose, and jocund eyes that seemed to see everything without staring. In spite of his white hair he had an air of youthfulness. He looked at life with a large and mischievous tolerance, and with an enjoyment that enjoyed things all the more because it had ceased to be greedy.

Kitty sat at one end of the seat — he at the other. Sometimes there was someone between them, sometimes nothing separated them but three feet of green painted timber. Kitty was not conscious of being noticed by him. He read a book, or watched the people and the sea.

She allowed herself to wonder about his red tie. Was he a Socialist — or did he like that particular colour? She had heard that Bernard Shaw wore a red tie, and she discovered resemblances between her picturesque person and the photographs of Bernard Shaw. Supposing it should be the great G. B. S.?

She was caught scrutinizing his red tie, and she had to retreat in confusion. She dropped her vanity-bag. The old fellow picked it up for her.

"Allow me."

He stood hat in hand. He was very tall, and as slim as a young man.

"Oh, thank you so much."

She was thinking that he had fine manners, and that his blue eyes had a humorous and ironical kindness.

"So stupid of me——"

He was smiling.

"Supposing we blame my tie?"

She was shocked. She must have been staring at him so very rudely, and he had noticed it.

"Your tie! Oh—please, no—I'm sure——"

"Supposing we sit down again?"

She sat down. She felt absurdly confused, and yet the feeling was not unpleasant. He interested her.

"I'm not a Socialist. It's a piece of symbolism."

"Oh, a piece of symbolism."

Was he laughing at her? And even if he was laughing at her she thought that she did not mind his laughter. There was something about him that made her want to laugh back.

"I'm afraid I was very rude."

"You were looking rather hard at my tie."

She nodded.

"I was wondering—— You see, you are rather like the pictures of—a celebrity."

"Good heavens!"

"Please don't think me awfully rude, but are you Mr. Bernard Shaw?"

He looked at her, and then quietly exploded.

"No; I wish you were right! Really, my dear young lady, I must take off my hat to you. You will see—that I have not the Shavian forehead."

She shared his amusement.

"And your nose——"

"Too hooky—I think. Though, my hair once did boast a ruddiness——"

He glanced at her shingled head.

"You have a touch of it. It's becoming—very."

The most irregular of introductions in which neither knew the name of the other, was the beginning of a friendship that was both informal and delightful. His red tie had introduced them.

They met each morning on the same seat, and listened to the music and to each other's voices.

She had found a name of her own for him — "Mr. White Man," and to him she was youth — youth as he desired to see it. Her gentleness was refreshing; woman ceases to be woman when she grows hard.

There was a curious and quick sympathy between them. Kitty, who had not known a father, saw in him the father of a wonderful month spent by the southern sea. It was as though they both enjoyed the impersonal atmosphere, the air of mystery, their namelessness to each other. They met like an old man and a child on the shore of time, and talked as an old man and a child can talk.

Sometimes she asked him questions.

"Do you live in England?"

No; he did not live in England. He had not visited England for more than twenty-five years. His life had been spent in the East, but in the end he had grown weary of the East, and the green island had called to him. He was going to England in April.

"Have you friends?"

"Not a soul."

"No one?"

He looked out over the sea.

"I have been a wanderer. That means loneliness — I think I was just beginning to realize how lonely an old man can be."

"Haven't you any people?"

"I had; but something happened in my life, my dear, very long ago, when I was fierce and impatient. That — was the beginning of Ishmael."

Kitty could not help being reminded of her own father; that almost mythical figure relegated to the underworld to which good women consign bad men. Her father was never mentioned; there was no photograph of him in the flat. But on one formal occasion — the day after Kitty had been confirmed — Mrs. Saumarez had enlightened her daughter as to her father's history.

"I thought it best that you should know. Now, if you please, we will never refer to the subject again. I was determined that I would forget. I — have — forgotten."

Kitty could remember the way her mother had crimped up her

mouth, and as she had grown older the daughter had cherished a secret and unconfessed sympathy for that father who had disappeared in search of an adventurous freedom.

The Jobsons teased her about her friend with the red tie. Who was he? Where was he staying? She had to confess that she did not know his name.

"But — that's absurd."

"But why should it be? We just meet in the gardens, and talk."

"Highly irregular," said Clara's husband. "Why don't you ask him in to tea, a villa tea with real bread and butter."

"Perhaps I will. I think he's rather lonely."

Which was true, though how lonely he was she did not know. He appeared to keep to himself, much as she did, though he struck her as a man whom people would take to. Those shrewd, merry eyes of his enjoyed life.

"Do you ever walk to the cape?"

They had met in the gardens as usual, but he appeared to be in a restless mood.

"Yes; nearly every day. Not many people go there."

"Is that why you go?"

"Yes."

"Supposing we go there now?"

"I'd love to."

As they were wandering along above the rocks and the sea, and under the occasional shadows of the pines she felt this restlessness in him, a reaching out towards something that he lacked and desired.

"It's a queer business growing old."

"Is it?"

He smiled down at her.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

He was silent a moment, as though reflecting.

"Never mind how old I am. The strange thing is that you don't feel any older. It shows in other ways. You begin to look back instead of looking forward."

"I think I can understand," she said.

They paused to watch a yacht putting out from the harbour of

St. Jean.

"Yes," said he; "you put out just like that yacht, but there comes a time when you begin to yearn for the harbour, somewhere to anchor."

They strolled on.

"So — you are going to England to anchor?"

"That's the pity of it. I have no harbour."

And suddenly she was sorry for him, sorry in a most strange way, sorry as she had never been for anyone else in her life before. There was something in his eyes — and his voice.

"But how sad ——"

"My own fault," he said.

They came suddenly to that little cape where a wood of pines raises a blackness against the blue of the sky and the sea. It was very still here; no wind moved; as they followed the path she became conscious of another kind of stillness linking them together.

"I suppose you wouldn't tell me ——?"

He did not answer her for a moment.

"I might. But, my dear, would youth understand? Yes, perhaps it would understand."

"Perhaps I should."

"Let's sit in the sun," said he; "the sun's so clean."

They went down close to the sea and sat down on two rocks.

"Ever heard of boys running away to sea?"

"Did you?"

He smiled queerly.

"I was a grown boy — a man, a selfish, restless sort of beggar. In fact — I was — what the world calls a bad lot."

She watched his face.

"What is bad ——?"

"Ah, that's the question. I wanted my own way; I was unhappy; I wanted my own way so much — that I did not care what happened. I was very much in love with someone else. She's dead now. Oh, years ago. And then — slowly — I began to realize that I was old. I was beginning to look back. I wanted to look ——"

She felt a kind of breathlessness.

"At those others ——?"

She had startled him.

"What others——?"

"The people—those you had left."

His eyes were on her face.

"How do you know, child?"

"I guessed."

"It's true. Two women; one may be dead; I don't think she would have cared. But—the other——"

"Your daughter——"

Again there was silence. He turned away and looked at the sea. It seemed to her that he was deeply moved.

"Yes, just that. I want to see the child I left behind. I don't suppose I shall ever speak to her. I don't suppose she would want to meet the sort of blackguard her father must have seemed to her. She would have been told——"

"Yes——"

"The mother's story. It's probable that she's her mother's child—not my child. She wouldn't understand——"

"She might."

"Oh, hardly. You see—we were incompatibles. It was my fault and it wasn't my fault. But now—I want to go back and look at her."

"Your daughter?"

"Yes."

"Is she alive?"

"I don't know."

"How strange!"

"It's more than strange; it's wicked."

She felt the sunlight on her hands and face; it had a warmth, a stillness.

"Would you tell me—her name?"

"Why not? Saumarez—Kitty Saumarez."

Almost she had divined it. Somehow she had felt it coming to her, spreading like a light over the sea, and yet though its very strangeness was ceasing to be strange, she was amazed at the chance that had brought them together.

Her father, sitting there and not knowing himself as her father, the father whom she must have looked upon with baby eyes! She was conscious of a sudden and impulsive tenderness towards him.

She trembled. Should she tell him now—or wait?

And he seemed lost in thought. He was gazing over the sea, and his eyes had a sadness. And her impulse was to touch him and to say:

"Look, here is your child. I—too—have suffered, and I understand."

She felt that she could laugh, and that her laughter would brim with tears.

"You have never asked me my name?"

He seemed to come back from a world of recollection.

"No; I rather liked the anonymous charm——"

"And so did I. But won't you ask me my name?"

"What is your name?"

"Kitty Saumarez."

His face had the stillness of astonishment. He had not suspected, or leapt to the revelation as she had done.

"My dear!" he said; "my dear!" and was silent.

His eyes had a kind of appealing, questioning doubt. The inspiration was to be hers. He was a man chained to the past as to a rock in an empty sea.

"Father——"

She knelt down with her hands on his knees. She put up her face to be kissed.

"Isn't it strange! I have never been able to use that word; but now—I can. I want to."

"Kitty," he said; "my Kitty"—and kissed her.

They walked back with linked arms. There was a kind of sacred silence between them, but when they came to the place where the lane ran up to the Villa Violetta, she looked up with a kind of radiant shyness into his face.

"My friends—they are such dears—— I want to tell them. Won't you come with me?"

He touched her cheek.

"Dear child—to-morrow—— To-day—is too sacred. Do you understand?"

"Yes; I understand."

She went in between the white gate pillars and up the path under the orange trees, and turning once to wave to him, was lost to

sight behind a hedge of Barksia rose. He stood for a moment with his hat in his hand, like a man giving thanks. He turned away, and went slowly back down the steep lane towards the sea. He was half-way down the lane when he heard her voice behind him.

"Father——"

He faced about. She seemed to come to him with a kind of stifled sweetness; she had a piece of paper in her hands.

"Father—— This—— It came an hour ago——"

She gave him the telegram to read. It was from her doctor.

"Return at once. Your mother very ill."

His eyes met her eyes.

"My dear, when do you start?"

"To-night."

"I'm coming with you," was all that he said.

So Roger Saumarez returned to his wife—but to a wife who was dying. Blanche Saumarez was in that state between waking and sleeping when the eyes see nothing or everything. When Kitty brought her father into the room, Blanche Saumarez looked at him, and continued to look as though behind the dim, blue coldness of those eyes, memory was searching. She did not speak; for she was beyond speech. Saumarez had taken a chair beside the bed. He laid a hand on the quilt. And presently Blanche Saumarez's right hand made a little groping movement towards it.

His hand went to meet hers, and closed on it—and thus they remained, silently looking at each other.

Escape

RICHARD JERMIN WAS BORED.

He made his way down the very stately stairs of the Camois Court Hotel five minutes after the dinner-gong had sounded. The hotel gong had the largeness and the thunder of an African war-drum. Like everything else in the Camois Court Hotel it was stately and huge and sumptuous.

"Playing bridge to-night?"

Mrs. Guadalla ambushed him at the foot of the stairs. She was feverish and forty, and always carried a little gold bag dangling on her wrist to match her bobbed head of tinted gold. She wore jade green.

"No; letters to write."

Jermyn was bored with Mrs. Guadalla. He got past her and made for the dining-room where Thomson the head-waiter met him with a gelatinous bow, conducted him to his table, and spread his table napkin for him. Jermyn bristled. All this fuss! For his boredom was the revolt of the man of sensitive appetites against the whole scheme of the Camois Court world, and against having nothing to do — nothing upon which to try the teeth of his soul.

For what, after all, was the Camois Court Hotel but a refuge for the rich who ran away from life, and who, in trying to escape from the various domestic problems, afflicted and irritated each other?

Jermyn was sick of it; he had been sick of it for weeks. It gave you too much food, too many spoilt children, too many gramophones squawking in private suites. It was full of cigarette ends, and little drinks, and chatter. People banged doors. They appeared to have nothing else to do but to bang doors. Old gentlemen arose in the morning with wet chests and irritable throats after too much alcohol and cigar, and proceeded to make moist and unpleasant noises. Jermyn had one such neighbour who cleared for action

with spittings and gurglings.

On the other side of him people quarrelled through a communicating door, until Jermyn had in a moment of exasperation, raised his voice in sarcasm:

"You'll excuse me, but I wish you would have your row out in the garden. It is not my fault if there are buttons off somebody's dress trousers."

After that there had been silence, a kind of ocherish, sinister stillness. But nothing could silence the old gentleman on the other side who had to get years of overfeeding and oversmoking off his chest.

Jermyn was an irritable person, but only when he was caged up in such civilization as that of the Camois Court Hotel. Away in the wilds of Africa taking photos of the wild creatures he was a different man.

After dinner he prowled down the corridor to the lounge, and stood on the edge of it, glaring. What a place! Full of smoke and chatter, and coffee cups, and liqueur glasses, and old women of both sexes. Big game! There were moments when he felt like turning an elephant gun on all that crowd. But he did not shoot elephants these days. Noble and wise beasts. It was pleasanter to make moving pictures of them. But the Camois Court lounge!

He turned back, and with a kind of panther-like glide, escaped through the writing-room into the garden. The hotel had a very fine garden and a park. It provided six hard-courts, an eighteen-hole golf course, and garage accommodation for a hundred cars. Often Jermyn had damned those cars. He did not mind an elephant trumpeting or the roar of a lion. That was life, not noise.

He wandered out into the garden. It was very beautiful and still. A full moon was showing above the old trees. Through the lighted windows of the dining-room he saw the waiters tidying up after the Camois Court had grumbled and fed. Decent fellows — those waiters. They had work to do, and better tempers than the guests. But it was all so damned material, fleshpots and big bellies.

Jermyn made for the moonlight and the old trees. A sudden strange sadness fell upon him, a yearning, a curious unrest. Oh, for Africa and the moon! But was that all? It was as though he had shed a fleshy skin, and walked like a naked spirit through the

stillness of the English night, longing for some strange thing to happen. He wanted something to happen. But what?

He stood under a century-old beech tree, and felt the moonlight splashing down through the great leafy dome. His lips moved.

"If only something would happen, something strange, something unphysical, something other-worldish."

He listened and watched. He was in one of those questioning moods when a man rebels against the limitation of his senses, and yearns for the space of some other dimension. Ghosts, fairies! Something that would convince him that life was not all guzzling and drinking, and puffing smoke and inanities across card tables. Almost his yearning was a prayer:

"O, God, send me a vision of something, let me catch a glimpse of the beyond. I want to escape, just for five minutes. Are we nothing but stomachs upon legs?"

Nothing happened. He wandered on. Between the trees the grass and bracken were splashed with silver. What mystery! And it occurred to him to think how strange it was that Camois Court never came out here in the moonlight, but remained in that fat fug. No lovers even! Did not the young things of the day ever fall in love and wander and dream?

Hallo! What was that?

He had strolled on, and was standing above a grassy hollow in which the moonlight lay like water. In fact, at the first glance Jermyn had fancied himself looking down at a little pool, but there was something more startling and unexpected than the effect of the moonlight. He saw a white figure move out from under the shade of the trees, and descend into the grassy hollow.

Someone from the hotel, no doubt. But a moment later he knew that the white figure did not belong to Camois Court. A ghost? He was aware of a little, chilly tremor along his spine, for the figure was approaching him; it seemed to glide up out of the hollow straight for the place where he was standing. No; it was no ghost, but something even more unexpected and perplexing, a woman walking in a pair of white silk pyjamas.

Jermyn stood very still, and with the stillness of a man who knew the jungle and wild life. For this figure was unusual. It approached; he was aware of its little, dark, bobbed head, and its

set and motionless eyes, and an air of dreaming rigidity.

The explanation flashed upon him.

"Good Lord, she's walking in her sleep."

Almost he held his breath. A somnambulist, pale and distraught! She passed quite close, and her gaze seemed to go through and beyond him. He turned and watched, and then followed, wondering whence she had come and wither she was going. He remembered the river at the foot of the hotel grounds, and instantly his curiosity was tinged with a feeling of responsibility.

She walked among the trees as though sensing them as the trees of another world. The ground descended, and between the dark foliage of a cedar and an oak Jermyn saw the gleam of water. Yes, she was heading for the river.

What was he to do? Wake her? But as the moonlit vista broadened he saw a white shape lying by the bank, a house-boat moored close in, with a gangway leading to it. The sleep-walker descended towards the boat and Jermyn, quickening his pace so that he should be near at hand should she walk blindly into the river, saw her go straight towards the gangway. Marvelling, he stood still to watch. He saw her walk unhesitatingly across the gangway, and disappear into the house-boat.

"Well — I'm — damned! Was she asleep?"

He walked silently to the edge of the river, and standing close to the white boat, listened. The stillness of the night was broken by a familiar sound, the stridor of a man snoring.

Jermyn was piqued. The next day happened to be a Sunday, though the Sabbath made no difference to the Camois Court Hotel, save that there were ices for dinner. Jermyn was an early riser. He went out to have a look at that house-boat as though to assure himself of its existence.

It existed. In fact it was very much awake, and Jermyn surprised a fat little man towelling himself in the early sunlight on the boat's poop. He had been bathing, and rotund and glistening he seemed to salute the dawn. The crown of his head was bald; the calves of his legs very round and solid.

Jermyn saw nothing of the girl, but he observed the name of the house-boat painted in black below the row of pink curtained windows — *Ain't She Sweet.*

So that was the atmosphere! The rotund little person with the bath towel looked like it. Pirouetting he discovered Jermyn on the bank, and with no sign of being disconcerted, greeted him.

"Good morning, sir."

Jermyn retaliated.

"Good morning."

"Bit fresh for a plunge, but—bootiful."

His lips rounded themselves to the adjective. Obviously he was one of those very cheerful, childlike persons with a perfect digestion, fat legs, and no spiritual qualms. He radiated the obese and the obvious. He was the sort of man who snored exultantly. Had not Jermyn heard him?

"You take things early."

The owner of *Ain't She Sweet* beamed upon him, and proceeded to get back into a suit of orange and purple pyjamas.

"Rather. Early bird. And the worm, too, sir. If you are up half an hour before the other fellow—you get the goods."

With an air of radiance he disappeared within to dress, and Jermyn strolled back towards the hotel, meditating upon matrimony or whatever it was in such a case, and just how a woman bore with it, and why she walked in her sleep. The fellow snored. Obviously he trumpeted cheerful platitudes all day. He was all round and polished, and without shadows.

About eleven o'clock Jermyn repeated his visit. He strolled along the bank and saw the fat fellow paddling about in a dinghy with a fishing-rod over the stern, and the girl lying in a deck-chair. She had a magazine on her knees, but she was not reading it. She lay and stared at the sky with an air of perplexed apathy.

Jermyn went a little way along the bank and sat down under a tree. The fat little fellow in the little fat white dinghy was as busy as a water-beetle. His bald head glistened.

He hailed his mate.

"Sylvie! Sylvie!"

She raised an obscure head.

"Yes, what is it?"

"You got the cream for the strawberries?"

"Yes."

"What about a Welsh rarebit? I'll come aboard and cook one.

I'm a dab at toasting cheese."

Jermyn's inward man nodded consentingly. Welsh rarebit! Obviously. Was it the Welsh rarebit that made the girl walk in her sleep, or was she suffering from other pangs and disharmonies? There was something likeable about that fat little fellow — and yet ——!

That night Jermyn went down and watched the house-boat. There was the same moon, the same silence, the same mystery. A sound of snoring trembled from the inwardness of *Ain't She Sweet.* And then the white figure emerged and crossed the plank of the gangway, and began to float over the grassland in its suit of white silk.

Jermyn felt strangely troubled. This mystery of sleep-walking seemed part of the greater mystery of things; it was a salute to the moon, and to all those mysterious pangs and yearnings which the immortal soul is heir to. A Welsh rarebit or tragedy? Could anything tragic associate itself with that fat fellow's snoring?

He followed. He so much as dared as to get ahead of the girl and let her pass close to him. He might have been and was invisible. Some other self walked in the body of her mundane flesh. She floated and dreamed, and Jermyn shadowed her white slimness until she returned to the house-boat and its happy stridor.

Something in him rebelled. He was conscious of qualms. Almost it was as though he was wanting to walk with the dreamer.

Monday and eight o'clock! Jermyn was down there and under cover in time to see the early bird off to business. Wearing bowler and black coat, and carrying a little brown case, he got into the dinghy and handled the sculls.

"Good-bye, darling."

A murmur seemed to come from the house-boat.

"Good-bye, darly-darly. I'll bring back a lobster to-night."

In Jermyn there stirred a little spasm of nausea.

It was not that he was just an idle fellow with a sentimental eye fixed upon a pretty woman, for in Africa Jermyn had learnt the love of watching instead of the lust to kill, and this Lady Macbeth of the barge had got herself mixed up with the moonlight. There was something a little frightening and poignant in the stare of her dark, sleep-walking eyes; for Jermyn she had

the lure of some gliding and mysterious animal.

But how absurd! What was she, after all, but a bit of suburbia mated to a little fellow who went oilily to business in a bowler hat, and who had christened his house-boat *Ain't She Sweet.* You might get very bored with his snoring and his cheerfulness, and his lobsters and his Welsh rarebits, but he was not exactly a figure of tragedy.

However, the urge stirred in Jermyn. He was curious to see how the live woman behaved while the man was away in town. How did she and *Ain't She Sweet* amuse each other? It was like watching life in Africa, and he sat under a tree in a tangle of bracken, and used a pair of field-glasses.

The flies were active, far more active than anything upon the deck of the house-boat, for the girl appeared to do nothing but lie in a long chair and gaze at the river and the sky. Occasionally the leaves of a book fluttered, and once Jermyn did discover her looking at something that might have been a photograph. As a matter of fact it was a photograph, the portrait of someone who was dead, someone who had died in the war.

The flies grew more aggressive, and Jermyn allowed himself a more active inclination towards the river. He strolled down; he approached the house-boat so that the woman remained unconscious of his nearness; he stood and observed her.

Suddenly he addressed her.

"Excuse me, but could you tell me where and how I can cross the river here?"

She was startled. She sat up in her chair. She tucked the photo away between the pages of a book.

"I beg your pardon?"

Jermyn, standing there with his hat in his hand, had the impression of her as a woman who was frightened. Now, what on earth had she to be afraid of? But was not a startled antelope just as fearful?

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid I have disturbed you. I wondered if you could tell me how I could get across the river."

She stared at him, but there was no recognition in her eyes. As a sleep-walker she was genuine.

"There is a bridge at Malton."

"How far?"

"Oh, two miles I think."

"Nothing nearer?"

"The hotel has punts. I'm afraid our dinghy is over the other side. My husband leaves it there for crossing in the evening."

Her eyes had a kind of vacancy. It seemed to Jermyn that even while she was speaking to him, her thoughts were elsewhere, absorbed in some other life. He was just a little piqued, for she was a comely creature, and she had for him a suggestion of mystery. She looked so unsuited to *Ain't She Sweet*, and a little fat fellow in a bowler hat.

He said:

"Thank you so much. I think I'll try the hotel. Peaceful spot, this."

Her eyelids flickered.

"Yes; very quiet."

"Some of us like it like this."

But obviously she was waiting for him to go; he had disturbed her melancholy dreaming, and his feeling of pique was merged into pity. He thought that she had the saddest eyes he had ever seen. It was as though he had surprised her in a moment of relaxation when she had ceased to stiffen herself with the starch of pretence, and had let herself drift like some Ophelia on the waters of oblivion. But, no; it was not quite like that. Her eyes reminded him of the eyes of an animal shut up in a cage.

He smiled, saluted her, and walked on. Now, what was the trouble? Was it just a case of boredom and too much lobster and cheerfulness and bowler hats, and digestive disillusionment? Was she just one of those young women who needed a floor to scrub? But then, was not the house-boat ready to hand, and all the multifarious fussings of the so-called simple life?

No; somehow he left her with the feeling that her disharmony was more than a mere matter of temperament. Possibly she was one of those who had scuttled into a cage to escape from life, and who now yearned to escape from the cage?

Jermyn wandered back to the Camois Court for lunch, and afterwards he lay in a long chair under a tree and meditated.

"That woman's bored," he thought; "and I'm bored; half this

tired old country is bored, and rushes about in machines to try and escape somewhere. I suppose that fat fellow is bored. But is he? Probably he is making money, and a man of that sort only begins to be bored when he has made much money. I think I'll get back to Africa."

But when the night fell and the moon rose Jermyn became restless, like one of the feline creatures of his wild world who must prowl when the stars are out. He walked straight through the stuffy lounge of the Camois Court Hotel into the summer night, and a curtain of mystery seemed to fall behind him.

Yet he retained a feeling for the ridiculous and the whimsical. In a tame old country, such as this, you went prowling in a dinner jacket and a boiled shirt to watch the possible antics of a young woman who had supped on lobster. For, presumably, the fat fellow had not forgotten to bring back the lobster!

Yet, was tragedy ever very far away from you, even in a tame old country where an ironical cynicism yawned over its little drinks? Did it not depend upon your definition of what was tragic? In an African forest things happened in the darkness, though as far as Jermyn knew animals did not walk in their sleep.

But this was the third night, and his curiosity felt quickened. He posted himself by a tree and waited. The moonlight met the river and the domes of the old trees. Would the soul of this woman walk? And, if so, why? Was it lobster and bowler hats and boredom, or something else, something more poignant and primitive?

Suddenly he saw the white figure appear. It crossed the gangway, but on the grass slope between the river and the trees it seemed hesitant and undecided. In fact the girl's behaviour was different, and at the end of half a minute's watching Jermyn realized why it differed. She was awake, and very wide awake. She walked restlessly to and fro; she looked at the river. Even when standing still she gave him the impression of a figure that was agitated.

He saw her go back towards the house-boat. She stood a moment, and then went down on her knees; she seemed to be sawing at something. And then he understood. She was cutting one of the mooring ropes. He saw her rise quickly and go to the other rope and bend over it. A moment later she was on the houseboat, and raising the plank of the gangway she pushed at it and then let it

drop into the water. A widening strip of moonlit water between the boat and the bank showed that the craft was adrift.

Jermyn, who might have supposed that she was playing a joke with herself and with the gentleman who snored, suddenly remembered Malton Weir and its vigorous curve of foaming water. The weir was less than a quarter of a mile down stream, and inevitably *Ain't She Sweet* would arrive at Malton Weir and take a toss into the seething pool below. Did this girl realize? Was she doing the thing wilfully?

And suddenly the active Jermyn came to life. *Ain't She Sweet* was drifting out into mid-stream, and he could see the girl standing on the upper deck of the boat. He hailed her.

"Hallo!—I say! There's the weir."

She turned her head for a moment, and then took no more notice of him, and to Jermyn her tragic wilfulness became more evident. His long legs carried him down to the place where the house-boat had been moored, for the girl had left the dinghy sleeping at its post. Jermyn made a dash for the dinghy, only to find that it was chained and padlocked.

Well, something had to be done, obviously. He tried to snap the chain, but without success, and a glance over his shoulder showed him *Ain't She Sweet* well adrift down the moonlit river. He tore again at the chain. Damn the thing! It held. He got his feet well forward into the bow of the boat, and heaved; the mooring post broke, and Jermyn went flat in the little, wallowing craft. The back of his head hit the seat. It hurt him, and hurt him badly. And suddenly he raged.

He got out the sculls, and gave chase, but the little tub of a boat had no pace. *Ain't She Sweet* and that mad creature of a girl had two hundred yards start of him; there was a good deal of water in the river, and the current set strangely towards the weir. Something in Jermyn raged. He knew he had to get aboard that drifting house-boat, and take tragedy by the collar.

Ain't She Sweet had drifted within two hundred yards of the weir when Jermyn ran the nose of the dinghy alongside, and holding the chain and broken mooring-post, jumped aboard. A moment ago, looking round over his shoulder, he had seen the girl standing in the doorway of the cabin quarters. Now she had disappeared.

He shouted.

"Hallo, are you mad? We shall be over the weir in two minutes."

A door slammed. He fancied that he heard the turning of a key. Had she locked herself in? Damnation! And that fat little fellow, her husband!

He gave the dinghy's mooring chain a twist over the house-boat's rail, and plunged for the cabin opening. It was all dark. He hit his head against something and swore. He was in a narrow passage with doors opening from it. He tried the nearest, and finding it locked, hammered with his fists.

"Hallo! hallo! For God's sake unlock that door. You're adrift, and closer to the weir."

Something thudded, a man's bare feet as he tumbled out of his bunk.

"Who's that? Who's there?"

"Damn you, unlock the door. You're adrift and on the edge of the weir."

A figure in orange and purple pyjamas blundered out. He blundered into Jermyn.

"Adrift. But how——"

"Never mind how, man; where's your wife's cabin? You have got a wife, haven't you?"

The little man let out a kind of yelp and charged down the passage. He shouted:

"Sylvie! Sylvie! Wake up."

He fumbled at her door. It was locked.

"Sylvie!"

And suddenly there was the noise of water rushing, a moist roar, and the house-boat's nose gave a dip.

"My God——"

"That door—break in."

Together they threw themselves against the door, but at that moment *Ain't She Sweet* took her plunge, and Jermyn and the husband were sent staggering. Jermyn felt himself clutched. He was in contact with a warm fat body, and then the rush of water came up the passage like a wave into a cave. The boat sagged and shuddered.

In the wet darkness Jermyn felt himself carried upwards along

the passage. Something warm and soft and struggling heaved against him. There was sudden light, a spread of spume, and he found himself in the weir pool, with a black thing bobbing close to him, the fat fellow's bald head.

Ten yards away *Ain't She Sweet* half submerged and reeling over on her port side, seemed to be sliding downwards under a sheet of foam. Jermyn, striking out, and spitting river water, watched the boat with a kind of furious and helpless anguish. And suddenly the white shape of her rolled over, and the tarred hull showed in the moonlight.

"My God——!"

He beat about and looked for the husband. Could the fellow swim? He saw the dark head and the bald patch not two yards away.

"My God! — she's gone under! Can you swim?"

A little choking voice replied:

"My wife——! Sylvie — Sylvie. Oh, it's gone."

They were swept down stream, and together they landed among some water flags close to a group of alders. They scrambled up a grass bank. There was silence; the silence of a strange finality.

Then, suddenly, the fat little figure plumped down upon the grass. It covered its face; it wailed.

"But we were so happy. I don't understand. I tied the ropes myself——"

Jermyn, dripping, with his boiled shirt bulging, looked at the little, pulped figure.

"She——"

And then he cut the truth out.

"Well, someone—— Pretty damnable. Probably the ropes were frayed. I happened to be wandering about; I live up there at the hotel. I saw one end of the boat sag out into the stream. One rope may have gone, and the other broken."

The little man wailed:

"Trapped in her cabin. Oh, my God! She slept by herself — because——"

He raised his face and blurted it out.

"Because — I snored. But we were so happy."

The Sand-Pit

THEY LIVED ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE LITTLE GREEN VALLEY, WHERE the sand-pit lay in a waste of bramble and bracken, and the lane from Claypits to Snodlands trailed its grassy ruts between high hedges.

Herrick owned the old red cottage with the two yew trees, and the faded blue door under the trellised porch. The woman occupied the new white bungalow which poor Gordon had built after the war. Herrick had been there three years; the woman less than six months. He had a shortened left leg, a small pension, and a passion for the open air. He grew fruit and raised chickens. His life was a busy loneliness in one of the wildest parts of Sussex.

That spring he became aware of the woman on the other side of the narrow valley, and sometimes he woud pause among his fruit trees and look across at her, seeing her as a slim figure moving over the grassland or about the rather derelict garden. She had inherited poor Gordon's chicken houses, those brown dots scattered over the hillside, and all poor Gordon's haphazard planning of things, his untidy enthusiasm, his after-the-war makeshifts.

Herrick wondered what she was doing there, but for some weeks his interest remained nothing but a vague curiosity. He wondered how old she was, and what she was like to look at.

From a cottage down at Claypits a Mrs. Jane Jenner came up daily to make his bed, and wash the crockery and do some desultory cooking, and it was Mrs. Jenner who made these human shadows upon the Sussex hillsides more real to each other. She gave an hour a day to Miss Merriss of the white bungalow. She gossiped cheerfully in both bungalow and cottage, and with a large and human cheerfulness that was insidious and persuasive. These two lonely people listened. They began to see each other more intimately through Jane Jenner's eyes.

To Herrick she said:

"Merriss — that's her name. She can't be no more than eight-and-twenty. Makes you wonder, doesn't it."

Herrick, washing his hands under the kitchen pump, was persuaded to contradict her.

"Well, why not? If she likes the life——"

Mrs. Jenner was dogmatic.

"A pleasant-looking young lady. Well, I never knew a girl yet, sir, at her age and with her looks — and chickens and likely to be satisfied. But it ain't no business of mine."

To Marjory Merriss in the white bungalow she was more picturesquely confidential. Her round, red face expressed motherliness.

"One of those ex-officers; he's got a short leg. Been here three years. No; I don't think he makes much out of it, poor gentleman; just rubs along, you know. Of course I does what I can."

"Is he all alone?"

"Sure. He must be terribly lonely at times, Miss."

"Perhaps he likes it."

"Maybe he tries to make himself like it. But I have seen a sort of look in his eyes——"

Miss Merriss did not ask to have the look in Mr. Herrick's eyes explained to her; in fact she pushed the subject aside, and led Mrs. Jenner's gossip into other channels.

But the seed had been sown. In the man's heart it grew openly, and with the vigour of a thing thrusting up towards the light. With the woman the growth was secret, because she tried wilfully to suppress it and to hide it from herself. She was not going to feel sorry for any man a second time in her life, for her first great adventure in sympathy had been disastrous.

Jane Jenner had views of her own. It seemed to her ridiculous that the red cottage should not be on friendly terms with the white bungalow, when there was everything to be gained by such friendliness.

Miss Merriss was queer. There was no doubt about it. As for poor Mr. Peter, Jane had seen him leaning on his hoe, or pausing, bucket in hand to look across the valley, and when Jane Jenner had looked in the same direction she had seen the figure of a woman.

"Bless us," she had said to herself, "why don't he go across

some time and speak to her? Fancy two young people living within two furlongs of each other and never meeting. 'Tain't sense."

It wasn't sense. Herrick accepted its senselessness and the realization of it made his difficult life more difficult. For three years he had carried on, living like a squatter in some new country, reservedly obstinate, seeing few people and speaking to less. Lonely? Of course he had been lonely; but he had contrived to grow accustomed to his loneliness, and then this problematical creature in petticoats had come to emphasize his isolation. It was a provocation. She had reintroduced the consciousness of woman into his life.

"I'll go across and call," he said; "we are neighbours. She must be pretty lonely."

But he did not go. His solitary life had exaggerated his natural shyness, and he put off the adventure until chance and Mrs. Jenner forced it upon him.

She came to him big with information. It was early in May.

"Miss Merriss has got 'flu. The doctor's bin, and has told her to stay in bed. And all her young birds to be looked after ——"

"Can't she get somebody?"

"There's only Silly Sam. And I wouldn't send Silly Sam to my worst enemy, sir."

Herrick looked thoughtful.

"I might be able to carry on for her for a few days. It is bad luck."

"I'm sure she'd be very grateful."

"I'll go over. But she's in bed. You needn't tell her, Mrs. Jenner, who it is who is looking after things for her. I'd rather she didn't know."

Jane looked at him shrewdly.

"Very good, sir; I won't tell her. I'll say it's a neighbour of mine, a steady chap I could recommend."

"Thank you, Mrs. Jenner. I'll go over at once."

As was to be expected Jane Jenner did not approve of such mystery, and before the day was out Marjory Merriss heard who it was who had come to her rescue.

"Mr. Herrick came straight across when I told him, Miss. Now don't you worry. He's a real little gentleman. And he said you were not to know."

Marjory, with a burning head and a sense of disaster hovering over her, was able to utter to herself the one word: "Bother."

"It is very kind of Mr. Herrick. Of course I'll pretend not to know."

Mrs. Jenner was filling a glass with milk and soda. She reckoned that the promise would not hold for very long, and that she could wait for it to be broken.

It was Marjory who made the first move. She was over-persuaded by her gratitude, and also by a growing interest in the unknown and lonely man who had come to help her and who appeared to expect no thanks. During the days of her illness she had an occasional glimpse of him passing across her window along the line of Gordon's ragged myrobala hedge. She presumed that he thought himself below her line of vision. He never glanced at the bungalow.

She waited five days. There was an element of vanity in her waiting, innocent and human vanity, for she wished to be seen sitting up in bed in her cerise-coloured jacket and wearing a white lace cap. Also, she had to make a confession to Jane Jenner.

"I can't lie here and let Mr. Herrick do all this for me without thanking him."

"But you are not supposed to know, Miss."

"But I have seen him."

Herrick, scattering grain to a crowd of birds, was called to Marjory Merriss's window.

"She wants to thank you, sir."

"I don't want thanking. Besides——"

"Well, she has seen you, and she'll be hurt."

Herrick went to the window, and stood there with a few windblown wallflowers brushing against his knees. The bed faced the window. Marjory Merriss was sitting up in it, propped against two pillows, her dark hair tucked under her cap. Her eyes looked very big and black in the pallor of her face.

"Mr. Herrick," she said, "I am very grateful to you for helping me like this."

He had taken off his hat.

"Well, we are neighbours. It seemed the obvious sort of thing——"

"Oh, no. And with all your own work, too."

"I have managed all right. Everything is going on swimmingly."

"Thank you; I know you are an expert."

"Hardly. I hope you are better?"

"Much. I shall be up in a day or two."

"That's good."

So it began. They were attracted to each other by those vague and almost indescribable qualities that appeal to the sensitive. She liked his voice, his reserved shyness, his lameness. He found something to wonder about in her eyes. It was not a question of mere propinquity, the throwing together of two human elements. Nevertheless, she resisted. On that first day when she went out into the garden and sat on the rustic seat Gordon had built on one side of the unkempt lawn, she looked across at the red cottage and prepared to renew her resolutions. Never again would she allow herself to be sorry for a man. And then she saw Herrick moving down the hillside. He followed the track beside the sand-pit, and disappeared into the green bottom of the valley. He was coming to the bungalow to feed her birds.

She waited. She saw him pause at the gate. He looked over it and saw her, and his face lit up.

"I'm glad."

"Yes; I shall soon be fit for work again."

"There is no hurry. You ought to be careful. These May winds are treacherous."

"Oh, I'm a cautious body."

She held herself in; she resisted, and she saw that he was aware of her reserve, and was puzzled by it. He looked at her a little anxiously, and then ceased to look. She realized how easily he could be hurt.

"It has been awfully good of you——"

"Not a bit."

He stared at the weedy path, and she knew that he was wanting to say something that would challenge her reserve.

"I'll carry on till you feel quite fit."

"I shall be quite fit in a day or two. Really, I can't let you——"

"It would be rather absurd——"

"Would it?"

"Well, wouldn't it? Besides——"

He hesitated, and she should have reinforced his hesitation, but

her hardness failed her.

"I don't know how I shall make it up to you."

He looked at her with sudden meaning.

"That's not necessary. It has been a pleasure. But if I might stroll across now and then. I'll not make a nuisance of myself."

His eyes hurt her: they appealed; they were full of his unconfessed loneliness, and of more than loneliness. She compromised with her past.

"Well, yes; I'll give you tea in the garden."

"Thank you," he said, and walked on to his work.

Two weeks passed, weeks of beautiful May weather, with all the growth of the year rising to the song of the birds. The gold of the gorse was fading, but the gold of the broom was there to take its place. It was a notable year for the blossom on the fruit trees, and even poor dead Gordon's wind-blown young apple trees were happily gay. The perfume of life was in the air. The landscape grew gentle with young leaves. Gentleness. He came to her gently, looking at her with deep and devout eyes; he had realized her resistance, and he respected it. His gentleness was her most perilous enemy. Her resistance weakened when it ceased to be attacked. When he would not take she began to desire to give.

She felt a crisis near, and her fairness to him involved in it.

He had come across and had asked her to go over and look at his little old place across the valley. Also, he had some plants to give her.

She went, her heart consenting and protesting. They climbed the path beside the old sand-pit with its faded yellow precipices, and all the way she was nerving herself to blurt it out to him.

He paused by the rotten old fence, and looked into the distance. It was very blue.

"Rain's coming."

"Yes."

The pause frightened her; for she knew that they were on the edge of intimate moments.

"I'm married."

She blurted it out as though she were throwing an unexpected stone at him. It sounded so absurd, so crude. She wondered whether he understood.

He glanced at her quickly. Her left hand had gone to one of the poles of the rotten fence on the edge of the sand-pit.

"Don't lean on that; it's not safe."

And that was all he said.

Later she knew that she would have to tell him. He did not ask her to tell him, and his quiet and patient silence made the confession all the more imperative. She chose an evening when Herrick had strolled across to the white bungalow at the end of the day's work; she sat in a deck-chair, and Herrick on Gordon's rustic seat; she told him to smoke, and he filled his pipe.

"It's about — my marriage."

"Oh?"

He gave her one quick, shy glance.

"I wondered whether you would. I'm grateful."

"There is no need. I was sorry for a man and I married him. It was after the war."

"Had he been in the war?"

"Yes."

She gazed out across the garden and the rolling gorse at the soft landscape backed by the grey distance of the downs.

"He had had rather a bad time. I was sorry. I thought I could help him. I knew he had queer moods, but I did not know that he was one of those men who are cruel, who love cruelty. I don't think he could help it. And the war must have made him more cruel."

Herrick had let his pipe go out.

"Possessed by a devil," he said.

"Yes — just like that, a clever, malicious devil. I heard afterwards — that as a boy —— Oh, well, I tried for two years, two horrible years — and then I gave up."

"What did he do?"

"His cruelty was more moral than physical. He had a queer cunning. He did nothing the law could seize on."

"Spiritual torture? Pulling the wings off one's soul."

"You can understand that?"

"Oh — yes."

"It was just that. It is worse to have your soul knocked about and humiliated —— And in the end I began to feel that I was

growing like him, and that he was dragging me down into a world of evil horror. I felt I had to escape."

"And this——?"

"Oh—this is my second attempt. I tried to trust him the first time, but he made it part of the game. It amused him. So I made up my mind to disappear. I had a little money of my own, and only two people knew my plans. They helped me. I bought this place under another name. And the peace of it—the open sky and the silence. Can you understand?"

He nodded. His eyes were looking at the ground, and they were very sad eyes.

"I'll try not to spoil it."

And suddenly she held out a hand, a quick and impulsive hand.

"Peter—— I can't promise things—you see."

"Never mind; never mind——"

He held her hand, and looked at the dim hills.

"Things happen all wrong. I'll not spoil your peace, dear. I'll help. It will give me something——"

Her fingers pressed his.

"Dear—— Oh, if I could! But there is always that in the background. Some day I know that he will find me."

"That's not a certainty," said Herrick, thinking of things that he could not tell.

But though they held apart, they were lovers looking at each other from a distance, soul mates set one on either side of a green valley, and the very distance seemed to make the relationship more dear. They were very frank with each other. They discussed marriage, and this particular marriage with the sincerity and the understanding of two people who had suffered.

"Of course—you ought to be free. The conventions are always a hundred years behind the facts."

"Isn't that rather wise, Peter? We—who feel that we could be a law unto ourselves—are bound to be penalized."

"You ought to divorce him."

"My dear, I have no evidence. He is very clever. He used to say: 'No, my lady, I am not going to be got rid of in that way.'"

One night, when wandering together up the lane, Herrick put the ultimate alternative before her, but she would not consider it.

Her voice was tragic but steady.

"No, no, dear man; I'll not drag you into that. There's a fastidiousness in my caring."

"I'm ready," he protested, "ready to bear anything at any time."

"You would be. But I have a feeling that it would hurt — hurt us both. Besides you are helping me so much."

"Well — anyway — I love you."

Herrick drove once a week in his old ramshackle car to Eastfield, combining business with pleasure, if a little necessary shopping can be called pleasure. He lunched at the White Hart — overlooking the market-place — and of late he had made a habit of loitering in the hall and looking at the entries in the visitors' book. The White Hart was the only habitable inn in Eastfield, and many motorists stayed here.

At the back of his mind was the thought that one day he might find a certain name written in that book, the name of Marjory's husband, and one September day he did find it.

"Howard Sheen. London."

He stood for a moment, staring at the signature, before walking into the White Hart coffee-room. The signature had been dated that very morning, and when Herrick sat down at his usual table in a corner away from the windows he was sombrely alert. He scanned the people at the other tables; one or two were farmers whose faces were familiar, but most of them were strangers.

There was that fellow by the window, eating as though he had urgent business before him, a tall man who at intervals, buried his face in one of the White Hart tankards. He was wearing a grey sports coat, green breeches of the plus four pattern, and fawn-coloured stockings with blue tassels.

Was this Howard Sheen? And as Herrick studied him he felt that the man repelled him. He had an air of easy arrogance, and a face that Herrick was not likely to forget. It was a queer face, badly balanced; sallow, square about the forehead, and narrowing to nostrils, and chin. At the root of the nose a curious ridge of skin protruded, with a deep cleft on either side of it giving the impression of a perpetual and unpleasant frown.

Herrick hurried his lunch. The man whom he thought to be Howard Sheen was still at the table when Herrick left. He bustled

his old car out of the inn yard, and in a quarter of an hour he had covered the five miles that lay between him and home. He went across to the bungalow.

Marjory was having lunch, and he spoke to her through the open window, resting his hands on the sill.

"I have just been to Eastfield, lunching at the White Hart. I happened to look at the visitors' book."

He saw her eyes darken and grow big.

"He is there?"

"I saw his name. And there was a man feeding there, tall and sallow with a squarish forehead, and a queer lump of skin at the root of his nose."

She stood up.

"Is it chance—or has he found me out?"

They looked at each other, and she tried to smile.

"Oh, well, I shall soon know. I am not going to run away from him."

Herrick's hands gripped the edge of the sill.

"I shall be here——"

"Not here, Peter."

"Well, over there. Do you doubt it?"

She came to the window and laid a hand over one of his.

"No; I was in Eastfield yesterday. Perhaps he saw me. But I don't want you to meddle, Peter, not too much for my sake—I mean."

"I'll promise nothing," he said. "All I know is that I am not going to let him spoil your life."

Nothing happened that day, though Herrick arranged his work so that he could watch the bungalow. When dusk fell he walked across, following the path past the sand-pit, his gun under his arm. He left the gun in the hedge before going up the path to the bungalow. The door was locked and the windows closed.

Herrick knocked.

"It's Peter."

She let him in, and they stood in the darkness of her little dining-room.

"I just came across to see that things were all right. I should keep your door locked."

"It may be nothing more than a coincidence."

"Perhaps. Why not go away for a day or two? I could drive you to Lewes."

"It's an idea."

She considered it, looking out through the open doorway at the dim landscape, while he stood in devoted silence.

"No; I think I'll stay and see it through."

"Just as you please. I shall be here — if I'm wanted."

When he was leaving her she made a sudden movement towards him, and seized his arm. It was as though she had some dim feeling of what was in his mind.

"Peter, I don't want you mixed up in it."

"Why, in what way?"

"Oh, I don't know. You won't try to interfere with him? He is so strong. It would hurt me——"

He was calm, and his calmness misled her.

"Don't worry, dear. I shan't get hurt."

Herrick sat up till midnight in his garden, with his loaded gun across his knees, but no sound came from the bungalow, and when the silence satisfied him he went to bed.

Very early, before daylight, Herrick woke with the impression that someone had been shouting at him, and knocking at his door. He sat up, thoroughly awake, to see his window as a mere greyness, with one of the yews stretching a black hand across it. He remembered that he had been dreaming of something, a dream of confusion and violence.

He pushed back the clothes.

"Hallo, you lame idiot!"

The voice came from the garden, a man's voice, deep and mocking.

"Hallo! I want a few words with you, Mr. Tertium Quid. I have been spending the night over there with my wife."

Herrick got out of bed. There was a kind of angry blaze in him, but he moved very quietly. He had placed his gun against a chair. He took it and went to the window.

"Who's there?"

He could see the man standing in the middle of his grass plot and close to one of the apple trees.

"My name's Sheen. Heard it, perhaps! Well, look here—I have had my wife watched. And you. She knows all about it now. I have a sort of way with women, Mr. Tertium Quid."

Herrick cocked his gun.

"You beast," he said.

Howard Sheen laughed.

"I've given her a lesson. Oh, no, I'm not going to divorce her. I thought you'd like to know. And now I am going back to make her get me some breakfast."

Herrick raised his gun.

"One moment. You seem to think that you can play with a woman's life. Well, you can't, and I'm going to prove it to you."

It had grown lighter, and both men could see the whiteness of each other's faces, but Sheen saw more than the face at the window, and he turned and ran. Herrick saw him make straight for the garden fence, and he decided to shoot when Howard Sheen should reach the fence. Yet he did not shoot. Something restrained him. He saw Sheen leap the fence, and go plunging down the hillside.

Herrick stood stock still. For the moment he was conscious of nothing but conflicting impulses, and of the knowledge that Sheen was heading straight for the sand-pit. Should he fire in the air, or shout, or leave the thing to end as Fate might choose? The daylight was broadening. Would Sheen see the rotten fence contrived out of old hop-poles that guarded the cliff-like walls of the pit? It was a mere line of flimsy grey rails and posts, almost invisible in a half light.

Herrick was about to shout when he heard that most significant sound, the snapping of rotten wood. It came to him quite clearly in the grey hush before the dawn, and no other sound followed it. The silence remained like water that closes over a dropped pebble.

Herrick put his gun aside, and hurried into his clothes.

He went down to the sand-pit, entering it by the track from the lane.

The sun was up when Herrick came to the white bungalow. He found the door open; he went in, to find Sheen's wife waiting, sitting upright in a chair, with a kind of horror in her eyes. She looked at him, and then hid her face in her hands, the face of a

woman who had been humiliated.

He trembled as he looked at her, for his love cried out and ran to stanch the wound.

"Dear — it is all over. He's dead."

He was aware of her eyes looking up at him with a new fear in them.

"Peter ——"

"No; it was an accident. He fell into the sand-pit. God! life's queer."

The Liars

On the plage of Grandville in August you saw the pale primrose-coloured sands stippled with red and white tents and innumerable little figures scattered like a handful of coloured beads. Life lay in three streaks: the life of the sea, the sands, the parade and the hotels; separate yet one, constantly changing its counters. The great white and gold casino looked like an elaborate white-sugared cake. The Hôtels Metropole and Splendid glittered like two great icebergs.

People who were supposed to matter stayed either at the Metropole or the Splendid.

Mr. Wilfred Jacks mattered; at least—he led the world to suppose so. He occupied a fourth floor room at the Metropole, and helped to colour the sands with a sky-blue bathing suit, and went nightly to the casino in black and white, and danced and risked ten francs on the little horses.

A bland youth, debonair, with a very sleek fair head and blue eyes that were both audacious and shy, he appeared to cultivate the pomp of life, or as much of it as the fashion of Grandville would allow him. He lay in the sun; he played like an ephemera; he hummed cheerfully like a fine young drone. A gilded youth—what! A child of the gods.

Daily from the Hôtel Splendid came the dark lady, walking slim-legged down to the sea in amber and jade green, and wearing the dinkiest of caps. Mr. Jacks, sun-bathing, saw her take to the waves, and the lure was trailed, but she was a fine swimmer and he was not.

On two successive mornings he puffed and splashed in pursuit, following a little amber-coloured cap, but she was too rapid for him. On the third morning he saw her swimming towards the raft. He, too, would swim to the raft.

He did, arriving there very blown, and glad to clutch at a loop

of rope. She was sitting on the raft, looking seawards, with her back to him, and trailing her feet in the water.

He heaved himself up.

"Excuse me, but have you any idea of the time?"

She turned sideways to look at the ridiculous creature who had asked such a question. Did he think that she bathed in her wrist-watch?

"Not the faintest."

"Thanks; I wanted to see how long it took me. It was exactly eleven-thirty-three when I started."

She showed hauteur.

"Indeed. And how——?"

"Oh, by the casino clock."

"It is still there."

She dabbled her feet again and displayed the back of a very pretty neck.

"Yes, I know; but I thought — well — at this distance——"

"Look."

He swept back his hair and looked.

"Quite right. Exactly — eleven-thirty-nine."

"Rather slow going."

He smiled; her chin had come back towards her left shoulder.

"Perfect — out here. The Plage looks like a flower garden, doesn't it? I can see my window at the Metropole."

"I cannot see mine."

"The Splendid."

"I'm looking across the Channel. I can't see a hundred miles."

"Hardly."

"Sussex — you know."

"You live in Sussex?"

"Used to" — and she drawled: "sold the old place. Becomin' too trippery, and the shootin' not what it was."

"Ah, just so. Dorset's our country. Jacks — the Dorset Jacks."

"Oh, yes; the Dorset Jacks."

"Used to be spelt Jaques. French extraction. Came over with the Conqueror."

She considered the sea and the sky.

"That's interesting. My name's Stuart."

"Stewart."

"Spelt with a u, not with an e w."

"Ah, I see——"

"Belonged to that crowd; Scotch—you know—them; same family as the Whitehall lot; descendants."

He thrilled a little, and in spite of the altitude of her ancestral past, transferred himself to the seaward side of the raft.

"You must be rather proud of it."

"I am."

"Especially in these—er—democratic days."

"Of course. And so are the Jacks, I suppose?"

"Oh, rather. There's a church in Dorset—full of Jacks."

"Indeed."

A somewhat corpulent Frenchman arrived on the raft, seemingly very full of sea water and determined to be rid of it. Miss Stuart looked pained. She dropped into the sea, and Mr. Jacks with her, leaving the corpulent gentleman to readjust his balance. She reached the shore half a minute ahead of Wilfred Jacks, and stood looking seawards a moment before strolling towards her particular little bathing tent. He was wading through the shallow water when she reached the tent. She entered it without troubling to look back at the slow-swimming male.

Jacks doubled across to the Metropole, gathered up a raincoat and a pair of slippers from a garden chair, and made a dash for the fourth floor. He changed with great rapidity. He looked very new in a nice pair of peach coloured Oxford trousers and a tight-waisted coat. He wondered whether he would be in time to post himself near that particular tent before she emerged. He was in time. He sat down on the sand, and a sudden shyness attacked him.

Obviously, she belonged to the smart set. She was the real thing; county, upper ten, or whatever you liked to call it. And did five minutes conversation on a bathing-raft authorize a fellow to raise his hat to a descendant of the Stuarts when she had changed her bathing dress for a Paris frock? Mr. Jacks did not quite know.

But—dash it all—he might just as well do the thing thoroughly. If this holiday was his great adventure, well—let it be unique.

She appeared, all rosy in printed chiffon, and wearing a little black hat. He got up quickly; he had a way of blushing on occasions, and he blushed on this occasion. He raised his hat.

"Took me seven minutes to swim back."

She looked just a little austere. A Stuart might be expected to show something of the grand air.

"Indeed. Perhaps you will do better to-morrow."

He blushed again. Really — he was a nice lad. And she smiled. Obvoiusly, the Jacks of Dorsetshire were considerable people.

"Someone has bagged my deck-chair."

He was off like a flash.

"I'll get you one."

But he brought two.

That was the beginning of their Plage romance. He supposed that she was staying at the Splendid with friends, but she confessed that she was quite alone.

"A bit stale, you know; end of the season — functions, everything. One gets jaded."

"Of course," said he.

"I came over here to lie in the sun and laze. Don't want to meet people — any of my set. When you meet them everywhere — for three months — Ascot — Wimbledon — Ranelagh — Henley, and every other night at some dance ——"

"Quite so. Like seeing the same people on the platform each morning ——"

He had made a slip, and he was aware of her looking at him with vague suspicion.

"Yes, I suppose so," she drawled; "but a car spoils one ——"

"Doesn't it. Never travel in a train if I can help it. By the way — do you dance — here?"

She gave him to understand that she was rather fed up with dancing.

"At the end of the season, you know — I'm awfully stale."

And quickly he confessed that he too had been dancing too much, for he was determined to remain in the high altitudes of the Stuart tradition. If this was adventure, well — he would live up to he high level of it. What he imagined to be the aristocratic atmosphere always fascinated him. But he did confess that he went sometimes

to the casino.

"The band's quite decent ——"

"Horribly crowded — I expect."

"Rather so. Funny people. Amuses me."

"Yes, what a quaint crowd one does meet everywhere these days."

"Doesn't one."

"One wonders where our lot get to."

"It's a fact."

"Are you staying long?"

"Another week. Have to be back on September 1st."

"Oh — shootin'."

"That's it."

"I am staying till September 3rd or so. May crawl on to Dinard — if this place begins to bore me."

The romance developed, and its atmosphere was unusual, aristocratic, languid, sophisticated. Iris Stuart appeared to be superlatively bored with life, and Wilfred Jacks panted after her as he had followed her in the sea. He, too, pretended to be bored with life. He began to dawdle and to drawl in what both he and she proposed to consider the smart style. Half yawningly she allowed herself to patronize the casino. They danced with languor; they sat about and sucked drinks through straws; they smiled vaguely, and remarked to each other on the strangeness of the people. Not the Stuart-Jacks crowd.

"Simply priceless — aren't they!"

"Gorgeous. Where — do — they come from?"

"Oh, Tooting," said she, producing a little mirror and a powder puff — "or Balham, or Putney."

Mr. Jacks, shocked, struggled with a vulgar blush, for he came from Putney.

But debonair young free-lance that he was he fell prostrate at Miss Stuart's haughty and sophisticated feet. He thought her marvellous, Olympian, a creature of languid mystery. And yet — he had qualms. They grew. There were moments when he began to wish — and so savagely — that she was not so elevated and superior. A hopeless passion, the coloured splendour of a week, seven romantic days!

If only she was the sort of girl you could take down to Hampton or Staines for a Sunday on the river! Horrid reality! But he was enveloped in stage ennui, breathing her rarified atmosphere, aping an aristocratic languor that felt like a wet shirt when he wanted to sit in the sun. Why the devil had she been born a Stuart?

Besides—he was in another quandary. If you behaved as an Olympian and took a young goddess to Grandville casino—you had to pay. Obviously! You were the gilded youth. You threw a fifty franc note casually upon a table, and looked as though it was beneath you to remember the change.

A waiter had pocketed a fifty franc note, and had offered no change. And Mr. Jacks had not dared to remind or to protest.

But the loss of that fifty franc note was a disaster. Sitting on the bed of Room No. 103, and examining the contents of his wallet, he realized that with the squandering of that fifty franc note his margin had disappeared. Three times he counted his French money, and the English pound note and the small change he had kept in reserve. He scribbled calculations on the back of an envelope. The situation was desperate. If he stayed the full fortnight he would not have sufficient money for the paying of his bill.

But the hotel might take a cheque. His bank balance at home was some three pounds on the right side. He summoned his assurance, and lounged down to tackle the clerk in the bureau.

"I say—do you take cheques here?"

"No, sir——"

"Not English cheques——?"

"No, sir, unless monsieur is staying—two more weeks—a month."

Jacks felt snubbed. Nasty, suspicious people! But the solution of the problem was obvious. He would have to curtail his holiday, and disappear homewards two days earlier than he had intended. Two days less with Iris! And he would never see her again; he could never see her again.

He walked up to Grandville castle, and sat on the grass and gloomed. Only two more days! And the blue sea and the yellow sand and Iris gone like a dream, an impossible yet adventurous dream. Damn it—why did he swim out to that raft? He had got his silly wings singed. The thing was too real. He had come by a

genuine wound.

At the casino that evening he was an unhappy young man who made a very poor attempt to appear blasé.

"I say, it's an awful bore — but I have to go back on Thursday."

She looked surprised — sorry.

"Must you! But why ——?"

"Business. My confounded lawyers have wired. You see, I'm a trustee, and we are selling some of the Dorset estate."

His wail was genuine, and she was curiously sympathetic.

"What a bore. I'm sorry, Jacko. But then — we may meet in town ——"

"Of course," said he desperately; "what's your address?"

"Ashley Gardens."

"Where's that?"

"Westminster; No. 273."

He brought out a pocket-book and scribbled it down.

"Sorry; I haven't a card on me. My flat is Sloane Square way. Know that part?"

"Slightly."

"Mozart Mansions. But — of course ——"

"Yes, of course," said she. "Ashley Gardens — you know."

For the next two days they were rather serious young things, and when he left Grandville to catch the Dieppe boat she saw him off at the station. They were sad. They forgot to be upper tennish. They held hands through the window.

"See you in town, Jacko."

"Of course, old thing. I have had a perfectly lovely time. I'm sorry — horribly sorry ——"

"So am I."

The moving train parted them, and Wilfred sat down in his first-class corner seat. He was bluffing on a second-class ticket.

"That's the end of it — you silly ass."

She had waved to him and turned soberly away.

"What a pity! And such a dear boy. What will he think when he calls at Ashley Gardens?"

So, they parted, and a week later a depressed and sentimental young man saw the great campanile of the cathedral black against the stars. The day's work was over, and he should have been at

Putney, but he had come to wander about Westminster, and to gaze up at windows, and to breathe the Olympian air of Ashley Gardens. He searched for No. 273 and could not find it, but he did not press the search too closely lest he might provoke some sudden disastrous meeting. The humiliation of it would be unsupportable, to have to confess himself a little charlatan, a junior clerk in a stockbroker's office masquerading for a fortnight as a young man of the moneyed classes. What a damned fool he would look. And worse than a fool.

"I wish I had told her," was his inward cry; "I ought to have told her the very first day. Such a game is all right when you don't feel serious——"

So serious was he that he walked all the way back to Putney, lamenting under the September stars.

Yet, on the very same evening a girl who might have been reading a novel in Highbury was wandering down Sloane Street. She, too, was breathing a dream atmosphere. She had looked up Mozart Mansions in the directory and had been unable to find this musical edifice. She interrogated a policeman in Sloane Square.

"Can you tell me where Mozart Mansions are?"

"What — mansions, Miss?"

"Mozart Mansions."

"Never heard of them, Miss. Sure you have got the name right?"

She wondered.

A week passed. Mr. Jacks, still dreaming forlorn dreams, descended the stairs from the offices of Messrs. Samsan & Cragg, and went in search of lunch. He was later than usual. He was about to pass through the glass doors of the familiar tea-shop when he had to stand aside for a girl who was coming out.

They stared at each other. Both of them felt scared and astonished, confused and glad, but the girl betrayed very little, the man much. He blushed. He looked miserable. He began an impulsive stammer.

"Miss Stuart——!"

"Fancy — meeting — you here——!"

"Yes — funny, isn't it——"

"Still busy with your lawyers?"

He swallowed hard, and his blue eyes entreated her.

"I ook here, I have something to tell you, I must tell you I have

been an awful cad. Can't we go somewhere for five minutes——?"

She looked at the building opposite.

"Perhaps. But where? We can walk—— What about London Bridge?"

"Oh, anywhere——"

"But have you had lunch?"

"I don't want any lunch."

He made his confession, and she listened but without that air of hauteur which is supposed to decorate the aristocrat, and without appearing bored. He poured it all out, the story of his little human adventure. For once in his life he had determined to feel like a man of the world; he had squandered half a small legacy on that holiday at Grandville.

"I wanted to feel what it was like, you know, doing the thing first class for once. I never allowed—for you. I thought it wouldn't matter. Just a few days harmless bluff. But then—you know——"

He stared at the river, and she was smiling, but not as a superior young person smiles.

"And then——?"

"I found that it did matter. I felt that I had done a caddish, cheap sort of thing. Just lied to you, and I had to go on lying. I knew I should never see you again. I am just a stockbroker's clerk, and I live at Putney. My name is Jacks—all right, but I have never been in Dorsetshire. Well, that's that."

He glanced at her profile, and wondered whether she would be very contemptuous.

She asked him a question.

"Did you go to Ashley Gardens?"

"I did walk round there one evening, just to feel what it was like to be where you were. But I never intended——"

She asked him a second question.

"Do you think that young women who live in Ashley Gardens lunch at city bun-shops?"

His blue eyes seemed to widen.

"No; but——"

"I don't live at Ashley Gardens."

"You don't——?"

"I live at Highbury. I'm a typist in a lawyer's office in Broad

Street. This is the first time that I have been to that particular place for lunch."

It was her turn to stare at the river.

"Good lord!" said he, "you don't mean to tell me——"

"We both hit on the same idea, my dear. Trying to seem and feel like somebodies for a fortnight. And we are just nobodies—both of us. We are quits."

Her eyes searched for his, and his eyes were intent on the same quest. They looked at each other; they smiled; they burst into sudden laughter.

"Oh—I say—I'm glad, most frightfully glad——"

"It is a relief—isn't it?"

"Old thing, I've been feeling rotten, a hopeless, helpless, swindling sort of beast. And we are just nobodies—— Though—of course—you could never be a nobody—Iris—I mean—not to——"

"Jacko," she said, "don't you think you had better go and have some lunch? I have twenty minutes. I could manage a cup of coffee."

They returned to their tea-shop, and the rush being over, they managed to obtain a table to themselves. They sat and looked at each other like consenting, carefree lovers.

"I say, Iris, what about—I mean if the weather keeps as it is—next Sunday—on the river. Would you come?"

"I'd love to."

The Broken Violin

MARTIN HARDY WAS IN A BAD TEMPER, WHICH STATE MAY BE excusable even when a man is a successful author, and that most atrocious of outcasts a world's best seller. The critics had begun to show prejudice against Hardy. They had praised his work when a book of his had sold some fifteen hundred copies, but now when a novel by Hardy was marketed by the hundred thousand they treated him as an excrescence.

But Hardy was not in a bad temper because of the critics. As a craftsman he knew that the work that they now belittled was better than the obscure stuff they had patronized. He was considerably rich, and in spite of it he still loved his work. He had rented for the winter the Villa Flora at Cap d'Or, and the Villa Flora was all violets and orange trees and blue sea and nicely tempered warmth.

Hardy's irritability had other origins. Probably, success lay a little heavy on his stomach. Too much dining out, too many cocktails, too many dances. The craft of the creator, delicate and whimsical, was refusing to spread its wings, because the man in Hardy was weighing it down with feet of clay.

He sat at his desk in the window of his writing-room. The garden below him was a big bowl of beauty set on the edge of the sea. The house was as silent as a sleeping cat. Yet Hardy sat and fumed and fidgeted. The stuff would not come. He had had a week of exasperating and inarticulate emptiness.

His senses felt overstrung. He was irritated by the passing of the trains a quarter of a mile away, and by the cars on the Corniche road. Angrily he had got up and swatted a sleepy and wandering fly.

And suddenly he became aware of another sound, the squeaking of a violin being played somewhere in the road at the bottom of the garden. He looked out of his window.

"Damn the fellow!"

For the itinerant fiddler had sat himself down on a camp stool in a sunny patch just outside Hardy's gates. He was scraping away sedulously; an empty tin deposited at his feet waited for the clinking of coins.

Hardy made for the door. Here was a discord upon which he could vent his irritation, something tangible that could be dealt with, and not like the trains and the cars. He did not ring for that excellent fellow, Sandys, his valet-butler. He went down through the garden, and pushed open one leaf of the iron gates.

"Hallo! you can't make that noise here."

Even while uttering the words he realized that the violinist was blind. The raised eyes were covered with a film of whiteness which gave them a queer, staring, and almost reproachful look, and the man's blindness added to Hardy's irritation, because it interposed itself between the scapegoat and his anger.

"I am sorry, monsieur."

The man was shabby and thin. He had a dim look. He wore a black felt hat, and an old frock coat buttoned tightly. The lids had closed over his sightless eyes, and there was something about his face that both surprised and shocked Martin Hardy. The face seemed to dream; it wore an expression of gentle resignation; it had a kind of dusty radiance.

Also, it annoyed Hardy, and annoyed the angry man in him. It was as though the face of this shabby fellow accused him of a futile, fuming egotism. It made him feel inferior.

He said:

"I'm sorry, but you can't play your violin here. There are plenty of other places."

The man smiled faintly.

"Is someone ill, monsieur?"

Ill! Yes, someone was ill, the craftsman in Hardy. And with a twinge of resentment, he told a white lie. He blurted it out.

"Yes; someone is ill."

"I am sorry, monsieur. Had I known I would not have disturbed the sick person. I will go somewhere else."

The fiddle-case lay on the path beside him. He groped for it, laid it on his knees, and with a kind of loving carefulness proceeded

to put his bow and violin away. One of his hands appeared to be deformed, and Hardy, watching him, was attacked by compassion and remorse.

He brought out his pocket-book, and extracted three ten franc notes.

"Here, take these."

It was both a bribe and an offering, and as the man's fingers felt for the notes the anger in Hardy died away.

"Poor devil!" he thought.

The violinist's face was raised.

"Thank you, monsieur, thank you very much. You are very kind. I apologize for having made a disturbance."

"Oh, that's all right."

Hardy stood mute, feeling that this shabby fellow had shown a magnanimity and a sympathy that put him to shame. He, the sensitive craftsman, the man who pretended to despise material things had bribed this poor devil to go away. He stood and watched the man fold up his stool, and sling it round his neck by the loop of cord that was attached to it. A crooked stick hung on the railings. The violinist felt for it, and tucking his violin-case under his arm, prepared to depart.

"Good morning, monsieur."

Hardy came out of his stare.

"One moment, you have forgotten your tin."

"So I have, monsieur. But there is nothing in it."

Hardy picked up the tin. It had a loop of string attached to it, and the blind man held out the hand with the stick.

"Would you be so kind as to slip it over my wrist, monsieur."

Hardy did so.

"Thank you. Good morning, monsieur."

"Good morning."

The novelist returned to the Villa Flora feeling displeased with himself, for he realised that this shabby fellow had behaved much better than he had.

Two or three days passed and Martin Hardy's inspiration still hung in the air like a bunch of grapes beyond his reach. Something had failed in him; he could not see things vividly as he was accustomed to see them; it was as though a crust had formed upon

the sensitive surface of his inner consciousness.

He was restless, troubled, and perhaps just a little scared, and suddenly haunted by the particular dread of the imaginative writer. Had he written himself out? When wealth and luxury and liberty arrived, was it possible that your familiar spirit took to flight and left you no more than a successful carcase?

Hardy walked in his garden. The flowers were there for his pleasure; the white villa was a delightful pleasure house; he had, or could command, most of the things that a man desires. And he was conscious of a feeling of emptiness, as though the joy and the virtue of creation had gone out of him.

He went out into Cap d'Or to spend a luxurious and easy hour at the barber's, and by one of the white pillars of the Hôtel Splendid he saw the blind violinist seated on his stool, and putting his violin away in its case. One of the porters of the "Splendid" stood over him. Someone in the hotel had complained, and the blind violinist was being requested to move on.

"Poor devil!" thought Hardy; "always making a noise, and always being moved on. While I——!"

He obeyed the sudden impulse. He crossed the road and spoke to the blind man.

"Excuse me, perhaps you remember playing outside the Villa Flora?"

"I remember monsieur's voice."

"If you wish you can use the villa gateway."

"Then the patient is better, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"I am glad. It is very good of monsieur."

"Not a bit."

"I should like to sit by your gate next week, monsieur, for it will be the week of the tennis tournament, and people will pass that way from the station."

"By all means use it then."

"I am grateful to monsieur."

Hardy went on to the barber's, and it seemed to him that the hands of Alphonse were more dexterous and soothing than usual; or was it that he had been inwardly soothed by the making of a magnanimous gesture? From the caresses of Alphonse he returned

to lunch and the ministrations of the superlative Sandys, and after lunch he dozed in his *chaise-longue* in the loggia. When he woke it was with a feeling of being rested and renewed, and to the sound of a violin being played. He smiled. So the fellow had taken him at his word.

Tea arrived; and after tea Hardy lit a pipe and went to his desk in the big window to write. His inner consciousness had cleared; it was as spacious as that window and full of the sea and the sky; life came to him to be set down on paper. He was aware of the peaceful exultation of the creator, and through his imaginings the sound of the violin played like a breeze through trees. It had ceased to be noise, and discord. It made a little plaintive murmuring at the back of his mind. It was both human and mysterious.

The violinist was visible to him beyond the white gate, but instead of distracting Hardy's attention the blind man was a figure of meaning. So, life played blindly upon its fiddle, sometimes with a resigned gentleness, sometimes with notes of pathos or of passion.

Hardy's pen ran on, but happening to glance up at the end of a paragraph, he saw a woman standing beside the violinist. She, too, was dressed in black, and her back was turned towards the villa. The violinist was putting his instrument away. Obviously the woman had come to take him home.

"His wife, I suppose," thought Hardy, and went on writing till the vivid dusk, still sunset-stained, made lights inevitable.

On the following morning he wrote from nine o'clock till twelve, with the blind man's violin keeping him company. People paused occasionally and dropped coins into the violinist's tin. Lunch arrived, and the hour of the siesta, but when Hardy woke from it he heard that thin and plaintive sound still threading the silence.

In a little while Sandys would appear with the tea tray. The sun lay hot on Cap d'Or, but in the loggia a perfumed coolness lingered, the fragrance of mimosa, and it occurred to Hardy that the blind fellow had been sitting for hours in the sun and scraping continuously at those strings. Tea in the shade was not included in the programme of poverty. But why not ask the poor devil in and give him tea?

It seemed a sound suggestion and Hardy got out of his *chaise-longue*, and walked down through the garden to the white gates.

He spoke to the violinist who was resting with his instrument laid across his knees.

"Good afternoon. Don't you find it rather hot out there?"

The man's face was raised.

"It is better than the snow, when your feet ache or are dead."

"Well, that's philosophy. Would you care to come in and have some tea with me?"

"Monsieur is very kind."

"Surely not. Too much sun can make one selfish."

"I will come in with pleasure, monsieur."

"Let me give you a hand."

"Oh, I can manage, monsieur. But if you would guide me. Gardens are puzzling places to the blind."

"Of course."

Sandys, hearing the bell ring, came out to the loggia for orders, and found his master and the shabby person sitting together in the shade.

"Tea for two, Sandys."

"Yes, sir."

Now that he had him seated in a chair Hardy looked more attentively at his guest, The violinist had taken off his hat. His black hair had no grey in it, and his face was unlined; he was comparatively young, probably not more than five-and-thirty. He had an air of breeding; he sat there at his ease, as though he felt himself in pleasant surroundings and appreciated them.

"You must have a big garden, monsieur."

"Fairly so. The mimosa is smelling. The more noise there is in the world, the more one asks for the protection of flowers."

"Yes, noise; it is one of the modern catastrophes. One should have earlids as well as eyelids."

Sandys arrived with the tea-tray, and there was a lemon on the tray, for Hardy sometimes took a slice of lemon in his tea instead of milk. He sent Sandys away, after signing to him to place a small table beside the violinist's chair.

"How do you like your tea?"

"I suppose monsieur has not a lemon?"

"But I have."

"You see, I am Russian."

"Then we will both have lemon. I expect you have recognized me as English by my French."

"Monsieur speaks French very well."

"That is very polite of you."

Hardy placed the tea-cup on the table beside the Russian's chair, and the violinist made him a little bow, and felt for the cup. His hands appeared slightly deformed, the left one more so than the right, the fingers straight and stiff and pressed together. There were scars on the man's wrists, and Hardy found himself wondering how he was able to manage his instrument.

"You have played the violin for many years?"

"Since I was seven, monsieur."

He smiled.

"You have noticed my hands, perhaps?"

"Yes; a result of the war?"

"The war after the war. I am an exile."

He sipped his tea, and his blind eyes seemed to dream.

"Man is a strange creature, monsieur. If you are interested in music you may have heard the name of Metchnikoff."

"The scientist? Yes; but I remember, too, there was a young violinist who was becoming the rage. I heard him in Paris."

"I am Metchnikoff, monsieur."

"You!"

"Yes; the ghost of him."

Hardy put down his tea cup, and stared. The Russian spoke with a calmness that had the resigned finality of the snow-covered steppes.

"How did it happen?"

"You see — I was a bourgeois, monsieur. Also, in Russia in those days when the savage beast broke loose it was a jealous beast. I had skill, and a reputation, and in Russia the beast desired to trample upon anything that was not of the soil and the gutter. They put me in prison. They did not ask me to play the violin to them. They put out my eyes, and cut some of the tendons of my hands."

Hardy's face looked shocked.

"Good God! It sounds incredible."

"But it happened, monsieur. Such things happened in Russia. They turned me out into the streets. I wished to die."

"And yet you lived. And you are here. How?"

"I had a wife, monsieur. She rescued me. She suffered incredible things, but she managed to smuggle me away to the south. The White Army was there then. Later, we found ourselves at Constantinople. Oh, that was a terrible city, terrible for women. Among other exiles we were helped to travel to the west. My wife had some jewels left. We came here, and been here ever since."

"And you manage to play the violin."

"I play it like a ghost, monsieur, as best I can."

"What courage!"

The words escaped from Hardy as though they had been forced from him by the pressure of this other man's tragedy, but the Russian smiled gently, and made a movement of the hands.

"Courage? Oh, well, monsieur, it is possible to come to the end of one's self, and to stand on the edge of an empty sea. But nothing remains empty. The child may be left alive in you, and the sun shines, and there may be love. And something stirs. You think and reflect; you dream. Nothing more terrible can happen to you than that which has happened. Besides, you may have somebody else to think of."

"Your wife?"

"Even so. She is a miracle. And now, monsieur, I must be returning to my place by your gate, for my wife will be coming for me, and she will wonder where I have flown."

Hardy rose from his chair. No longer did he regard the Russian as a poor, shabby scraper of fiddle strings, but as the wreck of a great artist, a man who still had music in his soul. Besides, what courage, what philosophy! He picked up the instrument case, and offered Metchnikoff his arm.

"Hold on to me; the steps are rather difficult. One, two, three, that's it. I'll guide you down to the gate."

"Thank you. You have not told me your name, monsieur."

"My name is Hardy. I write books."

"Ah, you too are a great artist. You understand."

"A little. And one learns. So you will sit here until your wife comes?"

"Vera is punctual."

"We must repeat this affair. Perhaps your wife will join us one

afternoon."

Metchnikoff sat down on his stool.

"Perhaps, monsieur. But she goes out very little; she keeps very much to herself. Besides, she works; she is a seamstress. Au revoir, monsieur."

The Metchnikoffs lived in a tiny flat at the top of a tall tenement house in the working-class quarters of Cap d'Or. That they were desperately poor goes without saying, and since Paul had no eyes to see with, his wife's eyes had to look forward into that curve of shadow that was to-morrow. They were the saddest of dark eyes, and when, on the Sunday, she came with her husband to Hardy's villa, the novelist wondered at her confrontation of the world. For she was one of those very gentle creatures with a soft pallor, and without a harsh line on her face. She had white hair, and its whiteness was a most strange garland above the face of her youth.

Hardy gave them tea in the loggia. He found himself looking at Vera Metchnikoff with a sympathy that had divined in her something strange and elusive. It was as though this creature with gazelle's eyes could not bear the eyes of a man to rest too frankly upon her. It was as though she had suffered so much from men, from the brute and the hunter in man, during those Russian days and afterwards.

Hardy found himself moved to great gentleness, for it seemed to him that these two exiles were like timid creatures in a cage.

"You, too, will take lemon in your tea, madame?"

"Please, monsieur, I prefer milk."

She looked at him intently for a moment, and he thought how like her skin was to creamy milk, and those two eyes were like dark flowers floating in it. But her gaze was questioning. It appraised. It was the searching, and half alarmed glance of the animal that has been hunted. It had both a desperate courage and the shadow of an ever present fear. It said to Hardy:

"What manner of man are you? Are you like all those others? My husband is blind. There have been those who have tried to take advantage of his blindness. Have pity."

And in Hardy, the man that loathed cruelty, the savagery of trap and gun, understood and answered. He could not put his intuitions into speech. This woman defended herself and her blind

mate. She said to the savage world:

"Have pity. Do not make use of me as a thing to be hunted."

He set himself to reassure her. He talked a lot of playful nonsense, and purposely he made his French execrable; he thought it would amuse her, and put her at her ease. He apologized for not being able to speak Russian, or to read Dostoievsky in the original. He handed round cakes, and afterwards he asked Paul to play to them, but not as he played to the idlers of Cap d'Or. He stood with his back to the loggia and his eyes on the garden while the blind man gave them a thing of Stravinsky's.

At the end Hardy applauded softly.

"Madame, your husband will always have the hands of a master."

He went and patted Metchnikoff's shoulder.

"You should be in an opera house again, not on that stool. The world should be applauding your courage as well as your music."

If he spoke and behaved a little extravagantly, and shed for the occasion the exactitudes of the Englishman, he felt that the pose was of value. These people were his guests, exiles, birds in a cage, and he wanted to win their confidence.

It was he who helped the blind man down the steps and guided him to the gate.

"We must repeat this tea-party. Perhaps, some day, you would consent to play to some of my friends."

Metchnikoff looked happy.

"Monsieur understands."

Hardy held out a hand to the wife.

"I hope that madame understands — also?"

She looked up at him rather like a child whose trust has been won. She smiled.

"Yes, monsieur. In this house one is not afraid."

The week of the Tennis Tournament arrived at Cap d'Or, bringing people from Cannes and Nice and Monte Carlo and Mentone. They came by car and they came by train, the fortunate and the wealthy, crowding to be amused by Miss Molly This and Monsieur Jean That.

It was a crowd that hurried restlessly hither and thither, worshipping the god of the proud flesh. It knew nothing of the Metchnikoffs of this world, of the little broken makers of music.

"Ping-pong" went the rackets on the courts of the Hotel Splendid—"Ping-pong," and hundreds of faces turned this way and turned that, and on the first day of the tournament the blind violinist collected seventeen francs and forty-five centimes in his tin. People were in a hurry to get to their seats, or to eat and to return from eating to those same seats. Ping-pong. Metchnikoff's violin maintained a little, gentle, sad complaining.

On the second day the tragedy occurred. Metchnikoff, venturing out by himself, fell down the steps of the apartment house and broke his violin. He broke it utterly and disastrously, and beyond all possible repair, for he had been carrying it in its cover instead of in its case. He bruised an elbow and cut his chin, but these were mere physical happenings. In breaking the violin he had broken himself.

Hardy, in whom the full tide of creation was flowing in spite of tennis tournaments and crowds of well-dressed women, missed the plaintive persuasions of the violin. Well, perhaps Metchnikoff had found a better place for his stool, and Hardy went on working. He spent one afternoon on the courts and saw an Austrian Count lose his temper and break his racket, and was amused. Did such things matter? Rackets could be easily replaced, and tempers recovered at cocktail hour.

Four days passed, and Hardy began to wonder. He told himself that he ought to look up the Russians. He finished a chapter after tea, and put on a coat, and went out to see the moon rise. Diana was full circle. She would rise up out of the sea, shooting her arrows across the water and spreading before her the swift splendour of her silver sandals.

Hardy strolled to the Aux des Fleurs. It had avenues of palm and pepper trees and mimosa; it scattered soft shadows; it was mysterious at such an hour. It was the promenade of the lovers, and also of those exquisite ladies who went where wealth went, and who gave to the adventure of life a provoking perfume. They, too, strolled under the trees, and sat on seats, and waited with a veiled boldness for the idle male. To Hardy they were like exotic flowers offering their pale faces in the dusk. They did not tempt him; they were just part of the decorative scheme of this very artificial world.

The moon rose out of the sea. She came up all huge and gold, and Hardy, having stood to watch this birth of Venus, turned and walked on. Someone else moved, and rising from a seat under the trees, seemed fortuitously to cross his path. Two eyes looked at him from a dim, white face; almost he caught the murmur of an invitation.

He stopped, and so did the woman. The recognition was instant. Her eyes were like two circles of glass, expressionless save for a stare of dismay, and for the moment her frightened eyes paralysed Hardy. Then, he grabbed at his hat.

"Madame——"

But she turned about like a figure twirling on a string. Her divergence to accost him had been silent and sudden, and her flight was just as silent and sudden. She fled, and Hardy stood holding his hat. He was shocked, but her flight had shocked him more than her attack.

He gave way to impulse; he pursued. She could not continue to run; the very nature of things forbade such headlong confusion, and Hardy walked faster than she did. He caught her up; he trailed after her like a shadow.

"Madame, I wanted to ask you why I had not seen your husband."

She stopped; she turned about and faced him.

"What do you wish, monsieur?"

He made himself smile.

"Surely—we misunderstand each other. You ran away because you thought that I was a stranger. Oh, well, we are people of the world. I apologize for startling you. Surely, you remember?"

Her eyes were fixed on his face.

"Yes—I remember. That is why——"

And then she collapsed on a seat, the last seat but one before the shops and the hotels began. She seemed to shrink into the thin darkness, to gather it round her like an inadequate garment.

"Something has happened. That is why——"

Hardy sat down, but not too close to her.

"Perhaps I can guess. Your husband is ill."

"No, not ill."

"Tell me."

"He has broken his violin."

So, that was it! But what a tragedy; for, obviously, violins did not fall from the sky, and mute strings meant no money. Yes; but that was to regard the affair merely as a financial disaster, and it was so much more than that. How easy it was to be a little god when you happened to be one of the world's spoilt children, whereas this woman had no short stories to sell at two hundred guineas apiece.

The silence had lasted too long, and he was aware of her acute distress.

He asked her:

"How did it happen?"

"He fell down the stairs."

"And the violin was broken."

"Yes. And without it——"

Her words were like drops of blood. They made Hardy feel most intensely uncomfortable. He was accused by the fact that she should have to explain to a comparative stranger that which was so sacred and secret.

He said:

"I must discover this—I must discover this for myself."

She was puzzled.

"I will call on your husband to-morrow. He will tell me. I shall pretend not to know. You see, madame, I have been one of the fortunate people; the world insists on giving me so much money. But I shall consider it an honour if your husband will accept from me another violin."

Hurriedly he stood up. He uncovered his head, and gave her a little, self-conscious bow.

"Good night, madame. Your husband will see me to-morrow."

He walked off. He did not give her time to reply. He had a feeling that she wanted to be left there alone to settle her ruffled plumage. Besides, it was so necessary that he should make it plain to her that he did not belong to the hunting fraternity, nor to the commercialists who buy song-birds in wire cages.

He felt hot and upset.

"Damn! It is rather a beastly world at times. Of course—you might argue that one was wasting one's pity, and that the woman—— But she isn't."

So Hardy called on Paul Metchnikoff and heard all about the tragedy of the broken violin, and then got into a taxi and drove to Nice. He managed to buy a violin, and he drove back with it to Cap d'Or, and climbed the stairs to the fifth story. He found Metchnikoff alone, and made his presentation.

"As one artist to another — you will permit me to replace that which was broken."

He placed the violin in the blind Russian's hands.

"Monsieur, it is incredible. You are too generous."

"Oh, no; the honour is conferred by him who accepts."

Hardy did not like seeing a man in tears. He got himself out of the room, but half way down the stairs he met Vera ascending. He became genial, boyish, casual almost.

"That's all right. I managed to get hold of a violin. Listen, I believe you can hear him playing it."

He smiled. He made way for her to pass him and go up to her husband. Her eyes were hidden. She went up three steps, and then paused to look back at him.

"You are a good man, monsieur. You have pity."

The Son

I

"OLD ENGLISH!"

He sat in the front row of the dress-circle, an Englishman from Africa, watching the evolving of John Galsworthy's play. His face was the face of a man who had lived much alone. His sympathy with "old Sylvanus" included a grim element of self-pity, for the play sharpened the point of his own problem. He was moved by its blunt vigour. The very blood of it was blood of his blood.

"Old English!"

York found himself in the street, trying to move swiftly through a crowd that clogged his swiftness. He jostled somebody and apologized; hailed a taxi and climbed in.

"Waterloo."

"Right, sir."

He lay back in the taxi and dreamed; but his dream was unlike a dream in that it had an inevitable purpose, for out there in Algeria a hunger had entered this Englishman's heart. He was reasonably rich in worldly goods; the life out there in that half-wild country had suited a man who had forsworn women because a woman had made a bitter fool of him many years ago.

He had his horses and his vineyards, his pinewoods and cedar groves, his maquis covered hills, his dogs and servants—but he had no son. It had made him restless, discontented.

Alone in the corner of a first-class carriage, York watched the flicker of the lights and the drift of the dark country. His eyes had an inward light, as though the final purpose had been lit in him, and the action of the play seemed to penetrate his thoughts.

English blood. Breed. He believed in breed—especially when he remembered the bastard crowd of a Mediterranean town. This

son of his should be pure Nordic, big limbed, big headed, like one of those old Norse wanderers. He had come to England for the sake of the breed, and to look at the English women, not for the love of a woman, but to find the mother of his son.

At a quarter past seven he was driving from Greenchurch station to Hookfield House. His aunt, Philippa York, lived at Hookfield House — where the Yorks had lived for many generations — a high-browed, high-coloured, prodigious old gentlewoman whom most people feared. Her nephew did not fear her.

At eight o'clock York faced his aunt at the end of an immensely long mahogany table. She looked to him like a distant figure in a portrait, and their voices seemed to meet in the silence of the great room, the silence of the deep country on a winter night. Panton, the butler, shuffled discreetly through the silence, and from the walls dead Yorks looked down on them.

When Panton had gone, leaving York his port and his walnuts, York made his announcement.

"I am going to marry one of the Shenton girls."

His voice sounded casual, but some men's casualness hides the hardened purpose. He was extracting a walnut from its shell. His aunt's voice came back to him across the length of silence.

"Which Miss Shenton?"

He had expected a shocked note, and he was surprised at its absence.

"The copper-headed one."

"That is Elizabeth, is it not?"

"Yes."

"How old is she?"

"Twenty-six. I'm marrying health. That is to say, if she'll have me. I want children."

Miss York, posed like a Queen Elizabeth, looked steadfastly at her nephew. She liked courage, a courage that knows its own mind. The terror that she inspired was largely the terror of insincerity confronted by a Britannia who loathed humbug.

"A very sensible decision, Byron, so far as your future children are concerned. I presume that you are going back to Mida?"

"Certainly."

He was surprised. He had expected a combat, for though the

Shentons of Beech Hangar Farm were respectable people, they were plain farmers.

"Does the girl know?"

"I have been there — once or twice. How much do women guess ——?"

His aunt smiled at him.

"My dear Ronny, if you have been looking her over like a horse-breeder in search of a pedigree stock ——"

"Well, I have, rather. She's a fine, gentle creature."

"Good lord!" said the old lady.

She looked curiously at her nephew; she was fond of him, and fondness gives insight; she was a mixture of cynicism and of understanding.

"There is the woman's point of view," she said.

York lit a cigarette, and his rather swarthy face showed no emotion. His aunt noted this apparent absence of emotion. She believed that her nephew could be capable of being very deeply moved. Lonely men run to depth rather than to shallowness.

"She's the sort of woman — who will be happy — if she has children."

"Are you going to tell her that, Ronny?"

"Oh, not quite so crudely. She's a good girl — I think."

"Has it occurred to you — that she might be too good — for you?"

He raised his eyes.

"No. How?"

"A girl like Elizabeth Shenton is too good for any man who marries her as though —— Don't you see? Why, the best children — the boldest children —— Think of your history books, Byron. The love children, the bastards. I'm not an old fool, and you would accuse me of being a sentimentalist, but I do believe ——"

Her eyes challenged him.

"What do you believe?"

"That your children are going to be — the better — if you love the mother."

He was silent awhile, staring at the broken shells on his plate.

"Yes; I had rather a sickener. Love! I'm cautious. But seems to me she's a fine, clean, wholesome creature. She'll be the mother of my children. I shall love her for that — respect her."

"I see," said his aunt.

She, too, indulged in half a minute's reflection.

"Well, try and begin it, my dear Ronny, before the children come. Women are human. It will be worth it — every time."

II

THERE had been a frost, and the world glittered white when York went down to Beech Hangar under a clear blue sky. He took the path through the beech woods, where the rusty bracken and the fallen leaves glowed below the smooth grey trunks of the trees.

The morning was calm, and he felt its calmness overlying the morning's purpose. He saw the red and pleasant breadth of the farm-house, its windows a-glimmer, the branches of its orchard all silver rime.

The door opened almost instantly to his knock. It was her sister who opened it to him, the black-headed one, Catharine, the eldest of the Shenton girls. Her eyes had a wise look, but she smiled.

"Mr. Shenton in?"

"No; father's at market, Mr. York."

She knew as well as he did that he had not come to see her father. She made way for him; she led him where she knew he wished to go, into the old long parlour, where Bess was sitting at the table covered with the red cloth, dressmaking.

"Here's Mr. York!"

She closed the door on them, and allowed herself the excitement of lingering in the passage where a faint perfume always floated — a country smell, vague and pleasant.

Elizabeth Shenton had raised her eyes for a moment to York's face, and had let them fall again, while she resumed her work. She had chestnut hair, dark eyes, and a face like milk — and sitting there she looked a gentle, pleasant, passive creature, beautifully healthy — just a woman, no more and no less. She waited. Her silence seemed to understand.

York had walked to the fire. He stood there for a minute with his back to it, making idle conversation, while the girl's hands moved at their work. Then he crossed to the window and looked out into the wintry garden, and at the moment of his passing the

girl had glanced up quickly and given him one long, deep glance. The quality of that look was lost upon him. It expressed wonder, devotion.

"Bess——" he said.

"Yes, Mr. York?"

"I am going back next month. I have come to ask you whether you will go with me."

She sat very still, so still that he turned to look at her, and wondered.

"Do you mean, sir——?"

"I'm asking you to marry me."

She let her hands rest on the table.

"Does—Miss York know——?"

"She does."

Her eyes rose to his, and as he stood waiting it struck him that this was the queerest love scene imaginable. So quiet. For he felt quiet towards her, kind—— This gentle, dark-eyed creature.

"Miss York approves," he said. "You see——"

And suddenly she let her head fall on her hands, and her face was hidden. She made no sound, and yet it appeared to him that she was weeping. He was a little shocked, touched. He went to her and gently touched her hair.

"My dear girl, have I hurt you? I——"

She raised her head.

"Oh—Mr. Byron—you—but I'm not——"

"What?" he asked.

"I'm—not your equal."

He looked down into her deep eyes, and somehow he remembered the words of his aunt.

"No; probably—you are better than I am, Bess. But if——"

She caught his hand in both of hers, and sat rigid, staring at the wall.

"I'll come with you, Mr. Byron," she said. "I think I would go with you to the end of the world."

III

THE car drove rapidly along the straight road across the plain,

with York and his wife in the seat behind the French chauffeur. In the distance the mountains closed the plain; there was snow upon them, and the great clefts that penetrated between the peaks were full of purple shadows. The plain was a chequer of rich fields, vineyards and orchards, very green in the African spring, and dotted with white farms and houses.

York glanced at his wife. She was sitting very close to him with an air of supreme trust, her eyes alive to all this newness, and her silence the silence of one who was supremely interested. She was not a woman who was given to exclaiming, and her silences became her. Already, York had discovered that he had not married an ecstatic fool.

"Anything like your dreams, Bess?"

Her colour still quickened when he spoke to her.

"It's wonderful. So green. I thought——"

"That North Africa was all sand?"

"Yes."

"People do," he said. "This country used to feed half Rome."

The car slowed up, and turning into a side road began to climb a long hill that rose like a wave above the plain. Here were vineyards and groves of trees.

"Ours," said York, smiling at her.

Her dark eyes filled with light.

"Ours," she echoed devotedly.

He pointed out a great range of white-walled, red-roofed buildings below the hill, standing among planes and eucalyptus trees.

"The farm, the stables, the wine houses. In a minute you'll see our house."

It came into view as the car topped the rise, white against a wood of pines, with a glacis of green-grey hillside sloping from it towards the south. It stood very high, looking across the plain towards the mountains, isolated, full in the wind's eye save when the wind blew from the north.

"Some view," he said.

She nodded.

A private road cut its way in spirals up the hillside, and she was glancing interestedly at all the wild and flowery tangle about her, the broom and cistus, the waving heaths, the asphodel, the

yellow *fleur de trefle*, the orchids and anemones. Resinous shrubs grew in a green-grey tangle, and above them the pines built a dark barrier against the sky.

They passed two massive white pillars, and were in the garden.

York apologized for the garden.

"A bit rough. I hadn't bothered much, you know. We'll see to all that, later."

The house was half French, half Moorish, and as the car turned into a little forecourt, Elizabeth York felt faintly bewildered. There were so many impressions beating upon her brain.

A group of servants, Arab and French, stood by the arched door; innumerable dogs seemed to be barking, dogs of all sizes and of varying degrees of fierceness, and a wind was blowing. Somehow, she had not realized the wind while they were in the car, but now — the bluster of it filled her with a sudden feeling of unrest.

York helped her out. The servants crowded round, and York, with that grave smile of his, called each by name.

"Bess, I'll introduce the household. This is Marie — your maid. Here are Ali the cook, and Abdullah the house-boy; Kaled the chief gardener, and Osman and Mahomet the watchmen. And you can hear the dogs."

The swarthy faces smiled on her, but the face of the Frenchwoman Marie did not smile. She was a little, thick-set woman, lame, with a darkly handsome and sensual face, and eyes whose expression never altered.

"Welcome, madame."

Elizabeth York's softer eyes touched momentarily the Frenchwoman's face.

"Thank you, Marie. I have heard of you — all."

She turned instinctively to her husband, as though aware of a sudden sense of strangeness, and he was the protector, the one English thing.

"What a view, Byron."

"Yes; no chimney-pots ——"

Marie was watching them with her cat's eyes.

"Shall I make tea, monsieur? It is ready."

York seemed about to answer her, but glanced at his wife.

"What do you say, Bess? Domestic orders — yours — you know.

Tea first, and explorations — afterwards?"

She flushed, and smiled up at him.

"Tea."

"Well — tell Marie."

So Elizabeth York gave Marie Delage her first order, and Marie took it with cold gravity.

"*Bien*, madame, but I have so little English. Did madame — say?"

"Tea — at once, Marie," said York a little sharply.

Afterwards he showed her the house. It had a bright spaciousness that was strange to her, and the big windows were full of the sky and of the great spaces of the landscape. She heard the wind blowing. The French furniture, the pictures, the rugs, the polished floors seemed so different.

On the broad stairs she held to his arm as though holding to the one sure and familiar thing in the midst of all this strangeness. The hall out of which the stairs ascended was a Moorish central court roofed over, its walls brilliant with tiles, and the upper rooms opened off the gallery above the court.

"A bit different, Bess ——"

"Yes; it's all strange."

"You'll soon get used to it."

Her face grew tender. It was his house, their home, and she was quick to feel his pride in it, and that he wished her to feel the same pride. She did feel it. Nor was she inarticulate.

"It's beautiful."

"That's right."

He flung open the door of their room, a long room full of sunlight, and a welcoming room, for, to her delight she saw that the furniture was English. She was a little homesick, in spite of her happiness.

"Oh, Ronny, I like it!"

Only twice had she turned the stately Byron into the more intimate Ronny. He patted her cheek. He felt that it was easy to be kind to her.

"Splendid. My dressing-room opens off it, and that door leads to the bathroom. It is rather a jolly bathroom. This room — you know ——"

"Yes."

"Is all yours. I—just sleep here."

He laughed, and then her glance fell upon an unexpected piece of furniture standing in a corner of the room, a child's cot, all lace and muslin, and pale blue ribbons. The thing made her hold her breath. It seemed to bring intimate and possible things so near. But, the cot—in their room—already? Perhaps it was a French fashion?

She went to one of the windows, drawing him with her by the hand.

"I'll—I'll try to be all—you want me to be, dear."

"Of course you will," he said kindly, and bending, kissed her hair.

IV

BYRON YORK was very kind to his young wife, for which kindness he could claim no credit, for she was a peculiarly lovable creature. In fact, the paternal temper of his kindness was a subtle insult to his own understanding. Elizabeth was to be the mother of his children, and as such she had a dignity and a human *raison d'être*, and in his own self-centered way, York was proud of her, for though she was a farmer's daughter he had married a finer gentlewoman than he imagined.

Elizabeth had nothing to complain of. Her husband was her senior by some fifteen years; she was no hoyden, and to her York's dignity, his seriousness, his air of height and of power were attractive. He was her man, her type.

She was one of those women who combine a quick understanding with a capacity for great devotion, and from the very beginning she had given her heart and her head, generously, and with a tenderness that was deep and sure.

She admired York intensely, yet not like a fool. She admired him on horseback, or among his dogs, or sitting at the head of the table, or giving curt orders to the Arab servants. She was practical as well as full of understanding, and her devotion took his life and made it hers.

She worked hard at her French. She took the management of the household into her capable hands. She had a natural taste for dress, and an instinctive hatred of anything that was loud and tawdry.

She could sit still and be silent with dignity.

People called from some of the other estates. They were French or cosmopolitan Scotch. They found York's new wife charming. It was agreed that he had done very well for himself, and that his wife's looks flattered his age.

"She is charming and she is good."

Very obvious praise no doubt, but true all the same, and the virtue of her was recognized by one or two irresponsible gentlemen who had too much spare time on their hands.

"*Une dévote.* No use hunting there—my boy."

Old Madame Le Noir, whose rich estate touched the mountains, winked a wicked, kind old eye.

"There will be many children. Monsieur York wants children. Yes; he will get them——!"

In the household itself the native servants soon became devoted to her. Her voice and smile made life pleasant; and she was no fool. The dogs were as wise as the Arabs, from Jean the big mastiff to Pompom the fox-terrier. When she went out to the great wired enclosure near the pinewood where the larger of them lived during the day there was an immense hubbub.

At night, Jean, and the two Alsatians were let loose to roam about the place, and shared with one of the watchmen the business of keeping off prowlers. Elizabeth would rather have had it otherwise, but York had to assure her that North Africa was not England.

"It is necessary."

"I saw Osman with a gun."

"That's so, Bess. And sometimes he uses it. If you hear a shot at night, just turn over and go to sleep again."

The knowledge that fierce dogs were loose at night, and that a watchman went his rounds with a gun, kept the place's strangeness before her consciousness, and prevented her from sinking herself in it with that wholly satisfying completeness.

She, too, was a stranger; and there were two people about the place who would not let her forget it, Marie the Frenchwoman, and Louis Proyart, her husband's manager and agent. She was an interloper, and she divined their hostility, nor was it a temperamental antagonism. Bess felt that there were reasons.

Marie's reasons were obvious. She had acted as housekeeper;

she had handled the money; she was lame, and a woman with a physical flaw is a woman with a grievance against other women. Logical, lustful, acquisitive, it is more than probable that she had had ambitions; the one white woman — and a provocative one at that — who had lived in a house with a lonely man.

"This butter and cream wife who was to bear children."

Proyart was a big, expansive creature with blue eyes that squinted slightly. He was extremely polite. He streamed candour, but from the very first Elizabeth had mistrusted him. The Arabs were afraid of Proyart. He was a bully. They called him "Le Commandant."

But York spoke of him as a good fellow.

"Knows how to handle the men. No nonsense about Proyart."

His wife was ready to agree that there was no nonsense about either of these two. What she felt about them was that they had very definite ideas, and too suggestive an understanding. It was an invisible partnership, uniting the various passions of both.

But, on the whole, she was very happy during those first two months. A rich and fragrant spring was with them, an African floweriness; the heat and the dust had not yet come. And York was very kind to her. She had not quite realized as yet the almost fanatical purpose behind that kindness.

A certain incident brought it to the centre of her consciousness. York was a great lover of horses, and he rode out over the estate each day on big black Cæsar. He was a fine horseman.

What more natural than that his wife should wish to ride with him? She could not ride, but she would learn.

"Ronny, mayn't I have a horse. Odgers says that there is a very quiet one."

Odgers was the English groom, a laconic and surly person — a much better fellow than his manners suggested.

She was surprised at her husband's grave face.

"Odgers had better mind his own business."

"But, dear, I should soon learn. I want to ride with you."

She was aware of his intent look.

"I think — better not, Bess. I'm not much of a believer in the saddle for women — when ——"

"Ronny ——!"

"Yes, a woman — ought to be careful."

She understood — and was silent. She had begun to realize that his thoughts were set on her having a child.

v

THE sign of that African house was the empty cot. And in her husband's eyes Elizabeth divined a waiting look. It was there when York himself hardly realized that it was there. He was for ever expecting her to tell him something, and when he had been out half the day riding, or away at Mida in the car, he would return and look at her as though she must have something to tell him. It was an obsession and, being the woman she was, she loved him for it.

Yes; even though she had begun to wonder whether he had married her for the sake of the child she could give him. She thought it rather splendid of him, this desire for a child. It did not rouse in her any feeling of jealousy, for she was not a jealous woman, and she, too, wanted a child. She was made for motherhood.

Yet, nothing happened, and she felt the suggestion of a shadow stealing over their relationship, an anxiety that was mutual yet unconfessed.

It hurt her.

For yet another incident quickened her realization of his purpose. York had been away for two days on business to Algiers, and during his absence Bess had had a letter from England from a younger sister who had been married a year ago, a joyous and happy letter. And when York returned and she met him walking up through the garden, she was unthinkingly full of this other woman's happiness.

"Such good news, Ronny."

She saw his serious eyes light up.

"Grace has a boy. I've just heard."

The light died away from his face.

"I'm glad. Lucky Grace——"

She caught his arm and held to it, hurt by that look of sombre disappointment.

"It will happen to us, dear. And I — shall be so happy."

"Of course — it will," he said with sudden gentleness; "you are

made to be a mother, Bess."

The spring passed away, and the summer heat was upon them, a season of dust and of glare when the greenness died out of the landscape, and the grey maquis grew more grey, and the pines more black.

It was Elizabeth's first experience of this African heat, and her fairness wilted, a fairness that had grown up among the English oaks and beeches. She had to struggle with a growing sense of languor and of apathy, and this physical burden was made more heavy by her other discouragement.

For she felt and knew that her husband was watching her, and sometimes it seemed to Bess that his watchfulness betrayed a little frown of impatience. Moreover, she was so much alone, for both she and York were shy of discussing the desire that had begun to exaggerate itself in the minds of them both. They avoided the subject, as people avoid the facing of a possible tragedy.

Also, the one other woman in the house appeared to have an ungodly insight into the problem that was vexing these two. As the summer glare increased Marie Delage seemed to grow more vigorous and swarthy, and with the wife's paling colour Marie's vitality glowed like some coarse and fleshy flower. And woman can be devilish clever in the wounding of other women.

Marie employed sympathy. She would come into the darkened room where Elizabeth York was lying down during the heat of the day, and after provoking an answer to some seemingly necessary question, she would stand by the couch and emit her poison.

"Madame would prefer her bath in the evening? Very good. Yes; it is blazing to-day. It is sad for madame — that she cannot bear the heat."

"I shall get used to it."

"Indeed — I hope so. But madame comes from the north. It is a question of skin. Monsieur was never troubled by the heat. He loves it ——"

Bess's languor was at her mercy. She resented the woman's torturing intimacies, and yet felt hopeless.

"I shall grow acclimatized, Marie."

"Would madame like a book?"

"No, thank you. I'll try to go to sleep."

Always, in leaving the bedroom, Marie would seem to pause and glance at the empty cot, and that pause and that glance were eloquent:

"Still empty. What a pity! And that is the real business of life. I know. Poor madame."

She would go out softly leaving York's wife bedewed with the heat and limp with a feeling of utter exhaustion, and a head and a heart that ached. She was wise as to her enemy, and it seemed to her that her enemy would continue to exult.

She hated Marie. She longed for an Englishwoman, one of her own blood, a friend to whom she could talk.

One day the house had been stifling, and in the cool of the evening she escaped from it into the burnt-up garden, and thence to the hillside and the pines. York had ridden over to Madame Le Noir, and it was probable that the old lady would wish him to stay to dinner, and Elizabeth was glad of his absence, for she was in one of those lonely moods when solitude seems the only solace. The sunset hung among the pine boughs, and under the rough wall surrounding the wood she found a stone seat.

"Grace has a child," she thought; "why not I?"

She had lost her northern bloom, and her eyes seemed to have grown bigger, and as she sat and brooded she heard Arab music coming from the farm, a plaintive melody that repeated itself like the yearning inside her heart. A child, a child!

Then, she heard voices. They approached up the hillside on the other side of the wall, the voices of a woman and a man, and she knew that they belonged to Marie Delage and Louis Proyart. The two were laughing.

"He won't have much use for her when he finds that she can't give him a foal."

There was more laughter.

"He would have done better with you, Marie, ha-ha. You would have obliged him——"

York's wife fled. She slipped away among the pines like a woman ashamed, and when York returned he found her lying motionless in the big room with her face half hidden in the pillow.

"Why, Bess——"

And suddenly she put out her arms to him.

"Oh — Ronny — Ronny, don't hate me."

He was more moved than she knew. He sat down on the bed and held her, and spoke gently.

"The heat tires you, *chérie*. You are not used to it——"

She had an inspiration.

"Ronny, can't we go somewhere, just you and I together, up into the mountains — somewhere where it is green?"

"I've been thinking of it," he said; "and I ought to have told you. We could be in Savoy or the Pyrenees in three days. Mountain air — what——?"

She clung to him.

"Take me. I have a feeling, dear—— Just you and I together."

It was on that night, with her tears upon his face that York realized that this woman was more dear to him that he had suspected. He loved her, not for what she could give him, but for what she was, his mate, his dear comrade.

And for a moment he was frightened by this love. It seemed so final. It came and stood beside the egotism that desired to see itself repeated in a child; it looked starkly upon his selfishness; it forced the possible frustration of his purpose and claimed a share of the regret.

"I have been rather blind," he thought.

It was the first crack in the shell of his complacency, and though it was but a crack it was there. His kindness became something more than kindness; it hid a little flame of passion.

"We'll get off to-morrow, Bess. Can you manage it?"

"Yes."

"Splendid."

They set out for Savoy.

VI

IT WAS a summer hotel among the mountains which York had chosen for their holiday; an unpretentious, homely place that was well known to him, a little Canaan, rich in milk and cream and fruit and honey. Its reaction upon Elizabeth amazed him. In two days she was a different creature, vital; bright-eyed, red of lip; all her languor had passed; she was the Elizabeth of Beech Hangar Farm, only more so.

But her reaction did not draw its stimulus merely from the mountains and their freshness, little plateaux where the grass was green, and the cool plash of mountain valleys, for if York had become aware of the change in his feelings towards her, she was no less aware of it. The man — her husband — was different. His eyes, his hands, his voice was different. He had begun to love her as a woman asks to be loved. He was not a man who loved easily, and therefore his love would last.

They drew nearer to each other. She was able to talk to him, as she had not talked before, and on this holiday of long rambles and climbings in the clean air, they grew to know each other. Their confidences were intimate and sacred.

A favourite retreat of theirs in the early morning, and in the evening, was a corner of the orchard above the hotel. Behind and above them the grapes were ripening in an upland vineyard, and from this vantage point they looked over a wooded hill into a green valley where the lights were always changing.

It was here that she made him realize how well she understood; and he, in listening to the voice of this farmer's daughter, was aware of his undeserved good fortune. She had one of those quiet voices which make the simplest words sound musical and oracular. It never grew strident, voluble, or silly.

His tenderness showed itself in playful touches.

"Your voice makes me think of milk, Bess."

"Why — milk?"

"Oh, I don't know. Fresh milk being poured out. Just — that."

Another thing that delighted him was her dignity. She was no cloying, amorous wench. She remained herself, even though it was a devoted self.

"Strange, Ronny, you should have married me when you could have married anybody."

"That's just it," he said; "I did not want to marry — anybody."

It was like a second honeymoon to them, but a honeymoon without any of the awkwardnesses and discomforts, for their intimacy was a relation of minds as well as of bodies.

York found that he could talk to his wife as though he were talking to a second self; what was more, he found himself asking her advice about the estate, the house and garden, the servants

and stock. He was less pleased with Louis Proyart than he had been.

"I have nothing definite against the fellow, but somehow — I'm not satisfied."

"I don't trust him, Ronny."

"Why not?"

"Instinct. I have a feeling that he is not straight."

"Odgers has hinted as much; but I don't like to listen to tittle-tattle."

"I know. You are big, Ronny. But I trust Odgers. He's a rough-grained thing, but he is sound. And then, there is one other person. I should be much happier, Ronnie, without Marie."

"Oh!" he said, surprised; "I hadn't noticed ——"

"Women behave differently to men. I don't like Marie."

"Well, get rid of her, Bess. You are the mistress; you do as you please."

Her warm fingers closed on his wrist.

"Thank you, dear. Being big to people makes them big to you. I'm not fussy."

"You're not," he said, smiling down at her; "you are the most restful thing in Christendom."

She snuggled close to him under the apple boughs, her hair brushing his cheek.

"I suppose it wouldn't be possible for us to have an Englishwoman, Ronny?"

"I don't see why not."

"Because — well — when something happens — I would rather have an Englishwoman in the house."

"Of course," he said gently; "you can have just whatever you wish, Bess. I'll see what can be done. And do you think — there is a chance ——?"

Her voice fell to a whisper.

"I do, Ronny. I'm not sure — but I think it is likely."

She glanced up presently at his serious face.

"What are you thinking about, Ronny? The child ——?"

"No; about you," he said.

"About me!"

"About — all that's best — for you. I can give you the best."

For it was coming to him slowly that his wife was more to him

than any child could be.

Back in Algeria again when the worst of the heat had passed, York left Elizabeth with friends of his who had a villa up above Algiers where there was a cooling breeze from the sea. He had business in Algiers; he had become a domesticated creature with his thoughts full of doctors and nurses, and there was Marie's successor to be found. An English resident, just returned from the Pyrenees, was able to help him in the matter.

"Izard is going home. You know Izard—and I believe he has a housekeeper who wants to stay out here."

York went to see Izard, who had a villa at the top of the Rue Michelet. He did not see Izard, but he saw his housekeeper, a tall, ruddy, kind-eyed Irishwoman named Jenny Rourke. Mrs. Rourke was a widow of five-and-forty; she could speak French; she appeared to attach a foolish value to sentiment.

"Oh, it's a baby you are thinking of, sir."

"Yes; I want someone kind and capable."

York liked the woman; he offered her generous terms, and she decided to come.

"It's a little lonely out there," he warned her.

"Well, there will be two of us, sir; and when the baby comes——"

She laughed; she had a reassuring Irish laugh, and an air of supreme good nature. Mr. Izard was going home at the end of the week, and she had thought of taking a holiday, but the change to the Villa York out by Mida would be as good as a holiday.

"Then I'll send a car for you. Mrs. York is staying up above there. The car can fetch you both."

York went on ahead to Mida, and surprised the people at the Villa York. They had not expected him, and the situation that he found there more than justified Elizabeth's distrust.

Louis Proyart had introduced himself into his employer's house, and was using York's bath and sleeping in York's bed.

Odgers, the groom, had something to say, and York was not a man of hesitations. Proyart departed, and with him went Marie Delage, furious, her face the colour of chalk, her mouth venomous.

"You take care, Monsieur. I know why we are being turned out——"

She screamed other vilenesses, but York took her by the shoulders

and walked her to the door.

"You had better be careful, my lady. I'm not a nice man when my temper's roused."

VII

YORK walked his horse across the fields towards a group of Arabs who were hoeing weeds between the vines, for since Louis Proyart's abrupt departure York had been acting as his own manager. Odgers of the surly tongue had been promoted to the post of foreman, and when the groom had protested that he would have to neglect the horses, York had sold all the riding horses save two.

York could see Odgers in brown drill riding breeches and a sun hat, chewing a straw and watching the men at work, and York smiled.

"No slacking when that little fellow is about."

He found himself surprised by his own smile, for half an hour ago he had left his wife in tears, the tears that had followed a confession.

"Oh — Ronny, I was wrong. I had hoped — it's nothing."

And he had tried to comfort her, finding it easy to speak tender and comforting words.

"Why — I've got you, Bess; that's the one thing that matters."

Yes, that was the extraordinary part of it; the woman mattered more and more, that hypothetical child less and less, just as though he and his wife had interchanged their attitudes. He had not felt any great pang of disappointment when she had told him that her hope had proved an illusion, but to her the disappointment had appeared very deep and bitter. It seemed to him now that his desire for a son had been nothing but restlessness, the restlessness of a lonely man, but since the coming of Elizabeth all that had passed.

Odgers saluted him as York pulled up his big black horse and sat watching the men at work. They threw roving glances at him, with much showing of white teeth, for the Englishman was popular. The groom had withdrawn the straw from his mouth, and his terrier's face, tanned and keen, looked up at York from under the shadow of his sun hat.

"Proyart turned up here this morning, sir."

"Proyart?"

"A little squiffy and out to make trouble. I threatened to loose the dogs on him, and he cleared."

"But I thought the fellow——"

"Didn't you know, sir, that he has taken Mustapha's farm on the Mida road?"

"I didn't know it."

"Marie's there, too. Spliced. A nice couple to have as neighbours, sir."

"Has he bought the farm, or is he renting it?"

"Bought it—I hear. On the proceeds of his scroungings here, I reckon."

York looked grave.

"Then their land joins ours. I don't like neighbours—with bad blood——"

"I don't think you need worry, sir," said the groom. "Proyart ain't exactly popular with this crowd. They'd be glad of a chance to shy stones."

Two days later York had cause to ride into Mida, and his way lay past Mustapha Farm. It stood on the high road, a narrow white house, with the farm buildings grouped at the back of it, and a patch of garden ground and orchard between it and the road. An old eucalyptus tree which had been pollarded grew beside the house, and on it a couple of storks had built a nest. Some of the fruit trees were in blossom, and a patch of arum lilies raised their white trumpets in the shade.

York was level with the gate when he became aware of a woman standing between the two white posts. She had a shawl over her head, and she was wearing a flowered apron. It was Marie Delage, or Marie Proyart, as she was now.

She smiled up at York with her big red mouth and her ominous eyes.

"Good morning, monsieur."

York pulled up. He had a feeling that it would be policy to show her no hostility.

"So we are neighbours, Marie."

"Yes, monsieur."

Her face was smiling and wicked.

"You see—our fruit trees are in flower. And look, monsieur."

She pointed to the eucalyptus tree.

"We—are lucky. We have storks."

"So I see."

And then, with her hands under her apron, she struck a pose that was impossible for him to misunderstand.

"I, too, am lucky, monsieur. Madame will envy me a dear *petit enfant, hein!*"

York rode on, hating the woman, and trying not to feel angry.

He said nothing to his wife of the Proyart's having taken Mustapha Farm, for he was unable to see how a woman's casual malice could affect the life at the Villa York, and it seemed needless to worry Bess by telling her the news. In fact, at the end of a week the matter had drifted out of York's mind.

He was happier than ever he had been in his life, and he felt that he could make Bess happy, child or no child. He had encouraged her enthusiasms in the neglected garden, and he was talking of buying a quiet saddle-horse so that she could ride about the estate with him. That they had been married for a year seemed to be incredible, for the months had gone very swiftly.

York was out on the hills with his gun when Marie Proyart paid that visit of hers to the Villa York. She arrived in a gig, driven by an Arab boy, dressed in full French Sabbath black, her mouth a bright cerise, her face like an ivory plaque. She made it a social occasion. She, too, was the wife of a *proprietaire*.

As it happened, she fell into the hands of Mrs. Jenny Rourke, who, whatever her prejudices might be against this particular type of woman, did not know her, Marie, by sight. And Marie put on the imagined airs of the wife of a *proprietaire*.

"Madame York is at home, yes?"

Jenny had no reason for saying that she was not, so Madame Proyart was conducted to the salon, and left sitting there on one of the French brocaded chairs while the Irishwoman went to find her mistress.

Elizabeth York was reading in a favourite corner of the garden, under the shade of a stunted pine, and in the shelter of a little group of cypresses. The garden fell away in floweriness from her feet, and above a hedge of roses she could see the great plain below

her spread in the sunlight towards the mountains.

"A visitor, madame."

York's wife closed her book.

"Who is it, Jenny?"

"Why, now — if I didn't just forget to ask her name. But — she's French."

Elizabeth made her way into the house, and on entering the salon she became aware of her visitor as a woman who had used much cheap scent. The room smelt like a Latin church. A Louis Quinze screen stood inside the door, and York's wife did not discover her visitor's identity until she was well inside the room.

"Marie!"

She was taken by surprise. Those cerise-coloured lips were smiling in the chalked face. She saw Marie rise and extend a hand as to an equal.

"I am Madame Proyart to-day, Madame York. Yes, my husband has bought Mustapha Farm. And neighbours should be on good terms, *hein*?"

Elizabeth York remained standing. She did not appear to notice Madame Proyart's extended hand. The impertinent motive behind the visit became obvious to her as her eyes took in the other woman's figure.

"So we are neighbours, Marie. Please sit down."

Madame Proyart resumed her seat, while Bess moved to the couch by the window. Her attitude was one of polite interest, putting the Frenchwoman in the position of an inferior who had come to ask for some favour, and who would be listened to with perfect courtesy. Elizabeth's silence waited. It seemed to place the white-faced woman at a distance.

She saw the gleam in the brown eyes.

"Madame still likes Algeria?"

Bess's silence continued. It demanded the real purpose of the visit, the words of Marie in place of the small talk of the self-created gentlewoman.

"I hope Madame York will not find the heat so trying this summer."

The brown eyes were insolently observant.

"I came to ask Madame York a favour. But — of course — I

wished to be sure. If Madame York has no use for *le petit lit d'enfant* — I shall be glad to buy it. You see — I shall need it — and Madame York ——"

She smiled, and her smile seemed to expand as she watched Elizabeth's face. She smiled with her eyes and mouth, her broad nose and chin, her whole body.

Elizabeth rose slowly to her feet.

"I am afraid I do not sell things, madame. I am sorry."

She moved slowly across the room and rang the bell.

"Madame Proyart will understand."

It was Jenny who opened the door, and Marie Proyart got up beaming.

"Madame York will excuse me. You should ask Monsieur York to borrow our storks. They have a nest in one of our trees. *Bon soir, madame.*"

She limped out with an air of triumph; but, as she was climbing back into her gig, Byron York came round the house with his gun under his arm.

Marie bowed to him with plump gaiety.

"Ah, Monsieur York, I called to see if Madame York would sell me her *petit lit d'enfant.* I trust she is not offended."

York stood still with a face of thunder, while Madame Proyart hauled herself up into the gig beside the Arab boy.

"You should borrow our storks, Monsieur York."

And she drove off, smiling.

VIII

FROM that day Byron York noticed a change in his wife. It was as though she carried about with her a secret humiliation, or a wound over the heart of her womanhood that would not heal, and the bright surface that she showed to him did not hide her sadness. For love had made York more quick of understanding. The tie between them had grown more sensitive, and he was able to feel what she was feeling.

There was that night when he surprised Bess on her knees beside the empty cot. She did not rise, but knelt there looking up at him something like shame in her eyes.

"I'm a failure, Ronny."

He was deeply moved. He raised her up, and made her sit beside him on the bed, her head against his shoulder.

"You are the most successful failure, *chérie*, a man could ask for."

"You say that out of kindness."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Then you are wrong, old woman. The fact is I'm not half so keen. I was a bit lonely here, and I suppose I got hungry for something — but when you began to take charge of me ——"

He was aware of a curious rigidity, a tenseness of her body, as though she resisted.

"But you were keen. It was the child you wanted, not me. Oh — I knew."

"You ought to have hated me."

"No; I loved you for it. I wanted to give you all that you wished ——"

"You have done."

"No."

"Do you love me less, Bessie, for not being so keen?"

She seemed to reflect a moment.

"I don't believe it, Ronny. It's only that you are big and kind to me."

"My dear," he said, "why don't you believe in me? We'll put that confounded cradle away in one of the attics."

But she would not hear of it; the suggestion seemed to frighten her.

"Oh, no — please. I couldn't bear it."

He was silent, and she wondered what his silence meant.

"Bess, there is one thing. It is not a thing a man likes to talk about. I have led a pretty clean life. But we ought to face the fact that it may be ——"

She understood him instantly, and put a quick hand over his mouth.

"No, Ronny, don't say it. I — know — it is not that. I'm sure. But — dear — how I wish ——"

Again, he tried to convince her that he was happy as he was, that he had never been happier. She listened with a kind of smiling

sadness, stroking his hand with one of hers. Her devotion had never been so deep.

She took it all for a wonderful magnanimity on his part, and she was grateful, but she believed what she believed. In fact, his obsession had passed to her; their parts had been reversed; she wanted a child because she wanted to give, to make the uttermost sacrifice to this man who loved her.

"We'll hope, Ronny — we'll go on hoping."

That was the tragic part of it. Elizabeth York felt herself to be a failure, nor could she convince her conscience that her husband's cheerfulness was other than an attempt to keep her in countenance. She could not believe that he had changed, for her desire to bear him a child made the change seem all the more improbable.

And she began to brood over it more and more until she began to think of herself as a woman who was in a false position, and who could not complete her part of the compact. York had married the wrong woman. He ought to have chosen one of her sisters.

Moreover, he was so very dear to her that she made herself face the fear of losing him, for true courage faces that which it dreads.

Might there not come a time when he would grow impatient — when he would begin to regret a marriage that was childless? And then ——? She knew that she would not be able to bear his impatience, and that her very love would side with him, even in the loneliness of her failure.

"I should want to die!" she thought.

But what was the use of dying? If he wished for a child, and she could not give him one, ought not the bargain to be cancelled? Yet marriage was more than a mere bargain. She found herself considering their marriage as a poignant and intimate relationship that could be broken only with a kind of solemnity, and by some act of desperate self-renunciation. Supposing that life drove her to the point of feeling that it was her duty to set him free? The thought devastated her, and yet she knew that if his life were in question and that the sacrifice of her own life could save his, she would give hers gladly.

But what a prospect! To take shame to herself in order to set him free! Was that the only alternative?

Happily or unhappily York did not — and could not know all

that was passing in his wife's mind. To please him she learnt to ride, and would accompany him about the estate; never had the household been run so efficiently; she welcomed his friends and made him envied. Her tranquillity hid an increasing purpose, for outwardly she appeared tranquil.

Yet Bess's feeling of failure was pushing her towards an act of blind self-renunciation. The plan grew gradually, and yet when it had come to completeness it retained an element of the incalculable. Nothing is final, and this plan of hers was far from being final. It contained much that was impulse, and a kind of subconscious wisdom that was more potent than any logic. She felt impelled towards the act she contemplated; she could explain it to herself and to her husband, and yet there was a part of her that knew that the unexpected might come of it.

IX

ONE evening in April a Frenchman named Lavie appeared at the Villa York. He was a big landowner south of Mida, and a great sportsman and a very good friend of Byron York's. It appeared that Lavie was off to the desert for three weeks with half a dozen friends to shoot gazelle, and he had come to ask York to join the party.

His bow to Elizabeth was gallant and propitiatory.

"If madame can spare him——?"

York seemed undecided, and his wife understood his indecision.

"Do go. I shall be all right here. I should like you to go."

Lavie was smiling at them both.

"Madame is generous. Why should not Madame York come and spend the time with my wife and the children?"

He did not realize that he had said the wrong thing, nor did Elizabeth allow him to realize it.

"That is very kind of you; but I take myself rather seriously, monsieur."

"Ah, the housewife?"

She made herself laugh.

"Yes; in England we have what we call spring cleaning. Take my husband away, and I shall put on an apron and cover my head

with a duster, and terrorize the servants."

York was looking at her with eyes of tenderness.

"It seems a selfish thing to do, Bess."

"Oh! Why?"

Her eyes held his.

"Should one always be together, dear man. I want you to go. You'll enjoy it."

She seemed so happy in making the decision for him that York decided to go.

"Well, our holiday will come later. The Tyrol or the Pyrenees."

In leaving her he left her as his châtelaine, with very definite orders to Odgers that he would be responsible for the farm, and that he was to sleep in the house each night. There was nothing little or meticulous about York.

From the very beginning he had given Bess her cheque-book, and told her that she could draw as she pleased for herself up to twenty-five thousand francs a year. She had drawn very little. She had no extravagances and no greeds, and the larger part of her expenditure had translated itself into presents to the people at home.

So York got into his hunting kit, and motored over the mountains with a merry party of men, and at one of the little oasis towns they picked up their camels and their Arabs and disappeared into the desert. He had shown some emotion, a man's emotion, on leaving Bess. She had been touched by it — humiliated.

"Good-bye, dear —— I rather wish I was not going."

He had held her close for a moment.

"Take care of yourself. You are precious, you know."

For two days after her husband had left Elizabeth York felt that she could not do the thing she had planned to do. She cared so much that the taking of that critical decision was a matter of self-martyrdom, but, in the end her very caring enabled her to decide against herself. There was Jenny Rourke to be considered, but she was under no obligation to tell the Irishwoman more than she wished to tell her. What more natural than that she should pay a flying visit to England while her husband was away?

Elizabeth decided to take Jenny Rourke with her, and when she had come to her decision she acted as though she wished by acting swiftly to make the step final. She was afraid of her own

heart. It seemed to her that she might find herself stronger when she was among her own people. Atmosphere counts for so much.

Odgers had to be told, and he showed no surprise when she told him.

"You'll be in time to see the primroses. Didn't some bloke write a song about getting to Blighty in April, ma'am?"

Odgers's quaint idea of humour nearly provoked her to tears.

"I am taking Mrs. Rourke with me."

"Well, of course. She's a useful body."

"I know that you will look after everything, Odgers."

"I will, ma'am."

"I am going to leave a letter for Mr. York. It's only in case he should come back suddenly."

Odgers saw nothing significant in her leaving a letter.

But, on the morning of her departure, she was like a woman whose soul—in dying—clings despairingly to the warm human body. She found that she loved the place better than she knew, the rooms, the garden, the pine wood, the wild and fragrant hills, the dogs, the servants. It was home. And more than home.

It was Ronny York, her husband, her mate, the man whom she had loved on those very first days when he had walked into that English farmhouse and looked at her with grave and considering eyes of his. She dared not look back when the car carried her down the hill and out on to the great white road that led to Algiers. She felt that she had left everything that mattered to her behind there in that white house on the hill.

York came back one evening just before sunset, looking very brown and well. He passed through the smiling servants into the house, and they heard his voice calling:

"Bess—Bess——"

The servants looked at each other. Strange that he did not know, and that madame had not returned!

Odgers, cantering up in a hurry from the farm, found his master wandering about the garden.

"I say—Odgers—I can't find Mrs. York."

"Why, she's gone to England, sir," said the groom.

They stared at each other.

"England!"

"Yes; soon after you left, sir. Expect she didn't want to worry you. She left a letter in case she shouldn't be back before you."

"Where's that letter?" said York, with a queer look in his eyes.

The letter had been placed behind the French clock on the dining-room mantelpiece, and Odgers, following his master into the house, stood by the door with his hat in his hand, waiting to report on how things had been going during York's absence. York was by one of the windows, reading his wife's letter, and the groom's presence seemed to bother him.

"Come back in five minutes, Odgers."

The groom was not a speculative person, but it had been obvious to him that that letter must have contained something rather unusual. For ten years or so he had grown wise as to the varying expressions upon his master's face, but hitherto Odgers had never seen York afraid.

"Scared — he looked — queer and scared."

Punctiliously, at the end of five minutes marked off upon his wrist-watch, the groom knocked at the dining-room door.

"Come in."

York was still by the window, but the letter had disappeared.

"Odgers, I'm starting for England to-morrow. I must catch the midday boat from Algiers. You'll stay on in charge — here."

"Very good, sir."

Odgers's laconic acceptance of the news was delusive.

"Now — what the devil's up? She can't have left him. Never saw two people more gone on each other."

X

YORK started to walk from Hookfield Station to Beech Hangar Farm. It was one of those rare evenings at the end of April when England is all that the exiles pictured it to be, a wet greenness seen against the blue and gold of a cloudless sky, and with blackbirds singing their hearts out.

York had the look of a man who had travelled hard and far, and with but little sleep. In Hookfield village he did not see people, for he did not want to see them, but at the cross-roads by the church he fell in with Miss Philippa York's motor-car, and his

aunt's quick eyes were not to be avoided. She rapped on the glass screen between her and her chauffeur, and the man pulled up.

York crossed over to the car.

"Well, upon my word, Ronny — why didn't you let us know?"

Her use of the plural was suggestive.

"Just a surprise visit, Aunt Phil."

"When did you come?"

"Just arrived. My luggage is at the station — one kit bag."

She observed him closely, but her imperious old face was kind.

"Well — I think Elizabeth might have told me. I was at the farm yesterday. Of course — you are going there ——"

His face had betrayed intense relief, and his aunt had noticed the change, and had been puzzled by it. Was there any trouble between these two? If so, her nephew's wife had concealed it very well.

"I'll send the car down for your bag, Ronny. I suppose you will be able to spare me a few days, both of you."

Her hand was resting on the side of the car, and York placed a sudden hand over it.

"You always were a sportsman, Aunt Phil."

"No trouble, Ronny?"

"None," he said calmly. "I was one of the lucky ones."

His aunt's car travelled on towards the Hall, and York took the by-road down the valley where the willows showed a film of green along the windings of the river. He was aware of an immense feeling of relief, and the relief deepened his emotion. Good Lord — what sort of panic had he been in? His imagination had run amuck ever since his reading of that most pathetic letter.

He had been afraid, with the unreasoning and deadly fear of a man whose whole consciousness had centered itself about one person. Women did such tragic things, women who loved too well. He had lived for three days with the thought that Bess —— But she was there, among those old trees, and as he caught sight of the glimmering tops of the great beeches he felt a quivering of the throat. What must she have suffered in secret that she should have been driven to do this thing?

To offer to set him free, because she felt herself a failure!

"Good God!" he said to himself; "I thought that I had made her

realize—— I'll make her realize—to-night."

The afterglow spread to the zenith as York passed through the beechwoods. Primroses! Yes, the last of them, and the first bluebells. He picked a few primroses, and inhaled their faint perfume, and the flowers became a part of his emotion. Through the green film of the young leaves he saw the farm; the pear trees were in flower with a whiteness that seemed to him miraculous.

He wondered where he would meet her, and how. Would she be sitting in that familiar room, bending over some piece of work? Those serious and dark eyes would look up at him suddenly.

Surely it was good to suffer, when suffering went so deep?

As he entered the lane he realized that he wanted her to be alone, with no witnesses however friendly—of that moment when they should meet. No, he was beyond the casual easiness of the ordinary human interplay. This casual age, slangy, and trying to appear deep by being shallow!

He came to the gate in the oak fence. He looked at the porch door and the windows. How quiet the place looked! He decided to go straight in.

But it was not York who opened the door. It was opened for him when he was within a few steps of the porch, and he saw his wife standing there. The afterglow lay on the porch, but Bess herself was in the shadow, a figure of stillness, looking at him with deep eyes. Yet, it was not the stillness of consent or of surrender. She stood in the doorway of their common life, ready to hold it against herself and him.

York's hand had gone to his breast pocket, but he looked at her, and in looking felt that there was a part of her he did not know. This beloved stranger!

"I have brought you—your letter, Bess."

She did not move.

"I want you to take it back."

She did not attempt to touch the letter, but continued to look at him with those deep and asking eyes.

"Only——" she began, and hesitated.

It may be that he understood the question that the whole of her was asking him, and he gave her the one and only answer.

"Bess—don't you know——?"

He saw her lips quiver.

"Oh — Ronny ——"

She saw and she knew, and her hands made a little movement towards him.

"If you ——"

She let him catch her — and his face seemed to her white and fierce. This strength of him was new to her — this almost savage tenderness. She could feel the beat of his heart — and all the surge of his dear necessity.

"Ronny ——"

She clung to him now, pressing her head against his neck, and her strong young body answered his. She understood now that the elemental woman had asked to be convinced, and that behind her seeming self-renunciation a subconscious cunning had watched and waited.

"I wanted to be sure, Ronny ——"

"That I wanted you ——?"

"Is a woman ever sure?"

"Well — you have given me three days of panic. What a man can imagine ——! Besides —— Look at me."

He put a hand under her chin and raised her face.

"I'm not a boy. I'm old enough to know what matters, and how few things matter. A friend or two, a house, a dog — and perhaps one woman. I suppose it's a matter of temperament. As for children ——"

She faced him bravely.

"You won't grow away from me, dear man, if no children come?"

"Grow away from you! As far as my observation goes — children put people apart — yes, very often. Let's be honest about it. I think my wanting a boy was restlessness and egotism."

"But if — I ——"

"You do?"

"I suppose women want children — for different reasons. Some want just children; others have children forced on them. I — wanted — your child."

York kissed his wife.

"Who knows!" he said.

XI

NEXT day York wired to a French friend of his who lived on a neighbouring estate in Algeria.

"Staying in England two months. Can you look over the farm for me?"

The reply was the response of a friend:

"Enjoy yourself. I am here."

So York despatched a telegram to Odgers and wrote two letters, and then went out like a boy with his girl to pick primroses in the April woods.

So the days passed, and York was content to follow the simple ways of that simple country life, while the woods grew greener and the apple blossom followed the pear. It was a wet but sunny spring, a spring of wonderful atmosphere, blue distances set in silver or gold, and no man who loved trees and green grass could quarrel with it. And York and his wife were just man and woman, going out together into the fields and woods, and asking nothing of life but they should be together.

Old John Shenton, who was a shy man, and inarticulate behind his beard, had begun by going about his own house and garden as though at any moment he would have to face about and lose himself in wilful blindness.

These lovers——! And married more than twelve months! How long were they going to take to get over it? But, gradually it dawned upon old John Shenton that York and his daughter were not ordinary lovers.

"Just like Adam and Eve," as he put it.

He found that he might play God in the garden, and that they were not troubled. They were just as glad to see him as they were to see the sheep-dog or the stable cat, or one of the gentle cows, another wholesome and live creature not bothered over the latest novel or the most recent scrap of genius.

Smoking his pipe of an evening, he discussed deep things with Mrs. Jenny Rourke.

"They seem pretty well content with things, those two. What are they up to now?"

Mrs. Jenny laughed.

"Going round with the egg basket when last I saw them."

"Like a couple of children."

"And why not — Mr. Shenton?"

"Oh, why not — sure!" said he, "so long as they're happy."

And then he would fall to teasing Kitty, his youngest daughter, and the others would come in with a casual clamour for supper.

"We have to get up early."

"What do you call early, my dear?"

"We are going to make butter, aren't we, Ronny?"

"My place is at the churn, Mr. Shenton."

Old Shenton smiled at him.

"And you are a rich man," said that smile. "You'll stay rich — in the right way — if you get up to turn a churn handle at six o'clock in the morning."

For a week they were with Miss Philippa at Hookfield House, and less happy there than at the farm, though the old lady put her car at their disposal. She was infinitely kind, and so were her old servants, but it was the kindness of people who were determined to put York's wife at her ease. Which kindness was quite unnecessary, and too obtrusive in certain quarters.

Bess laughed over it.

"The great Pynton has been telling me what I ought to wear to-night, Ronny."

"Wear — yourself."

"I'm going to."

For Miss Philippa had thought it her duty to collect some of her neighbours and to give a dinner-party for the official benefit of those who were convinced that Byron York had married beneath him. Which was obvious, and yet not at all obvious when Bess put on a Paquin frock, and sat and talked to old Sir Julian Burgetrode as though he had neither bushy eyebrows nor a fierce red nose.

Early in June they were back at Beech Hangar, and spending a last week there before returning to Algeria. York's plan was to go back to Mida for two or three weeks, see that things were in order, engage another manager, and then to take his wife to the Pyrenees. He wished her to escape the heat of July and August.

York was away for a night or two in town, busy with his tailor, and arranging for seats on the train south, and for a cabin from

Marseilles to Algiers. Bess remained at Beech Hangar. Her sister Grace was coming over with her child, and Bess wished to see them both. The Shentons were clannish people, but Elizabeth York had other reasons.

When York came back from town Elizabeth had news for him. He found her sitting in the orchard under one of the apple trees, and there was a something in her eyes that made him wonder, an inward knowledge, an air of annunciation. Her smile was different. She did not rise to meet him, but suffered him to come to her.

Bending to kiss her he felt her two hands clasping his.

"It has happened — Ronny."

"My dear ——!"

"Are you glad?"

Men are strange creatures, and York was both glad and sorry, but he showed her only his gladness.

"You had better stay in England — Bess."

But she would not hear of it.

"Our home is out there. I want it to happen there. Besides — it won't happen for a long time — yet."

XII

CHRISTOPHER ODGERS could be usefully reticent; he was not the sort of servant who blurted out a list of all the disasters that had happened during his master's absence.

"Nothing happened, Kit?"

"Nothing, sir. Hope you are well, sir?"

Odgers was quite sure that if York had to be told of any unpleasant incidents, well — to-morrow would do for the telling of them. Why take the smile off the pretty lady's face, though Arabs were Arabs, and men got drunk, and guns went off and killed people?

But York had to be told next day, though Odgers managed to give him the news as though it were supremely unimportant.

"I have had trouble, sir, with Proyart. Came around one evening — shouting drunk; we had to throw him out. I went down afterwards, and saw Marie and had a talk with her. Said if it happened again we should have to take out a *procès verbal* or what-

ever they call it. She used to be a sensible woman when she was Marie Delage."

"Isn't she now?"

"Well—yes and no. Rather like a cat, sir; not sure whether she is going to scratch or not."

"Anything else, Odgers?"

"Mahomet shot a thief a few nights ago. This side of the garden wall. Mahomet had shouted three times before firing."

"Killed the man?"

"Sure."

"An Arab?"

"Yes. We buried him. Maybe a bit of a nuisance for Mahomet, sir, but that's all."

"There is always the revenge."

"Just so, sir; but that's Mahomet's business—and I reckon he knows it."

York looked serious, for though life was not over-valued in Algeria, and a thief could be shot when certain formalities had been complied with, and nothing would be said, he knew that it would mean bad blood, and the beginning of an Arab vendetta.

"A pity Mahomet didn't shoot to scare him."

"The fellow had a gun," said the laconic Odgers.

"Confound him! Look here, man, I don't want Mrs. York to know anything about this."

"No need for her to know anything, sir."

For all York's thoughts centred about his wife and the young, unborn life that was theirs. Englishmen may be sentimentalists, and if a husband is not something of a sentimentalist he is but a sorry mate in times of human crisis. There was nothing that could be done that York did not do.

His ingenious tenderness was a source of great amusement to old Madame Le Noir, who came often to the villa to observe what she called "This exceptional marriage." But then—as she put it:

"York was always an enthusiast, and did things thoroughly. Had he been born a *bon viveur,* no household would have been safe! But being devoted, *tien*, he builds a glass-house round marriage."

Her wickedly humorous old face masked a sympathetic curiosity.

"Glass-house, did I say? Let us call it an ice-house in which the

absurd man shelters the lady so that she shall not melt. Electric fans — everywhere. And have you seen the grotto in the garden — with a little fountain playing, and green things growing? What extravagance in water! But — then — if a man is not extravagant sometimes — he is but a poor creature. Dr. Edouard comes out every week from Algiers. It should be a wonderful infant!"

Yet nothing seemed like suggestion, and the whole York household became permeated by the suggestiveness of monsieur's devotion. Jenny Rourke revelled in it. The quiet feet of the Arab servants seemed to grow even quieter. Mahomet and Osman, the two watchmen, were forever on the prowl about the place as though they were guarding one of the holy places of the Prophet. Kaled, the gardener, made himself an invisible spirit, toiling to keep a few flowers alive by morning and evening splashings with his water-pot. Two of the dogs took to emulating the humans, Jean the mastiff, and Pom-Pom the fox-terrier. Pom-pom spent the day curled up close to Elizabeth, and never so sound asleep as to miss a movement. Jean's solicitude exercised itself in the garden. The big dog hardly ever left York's wife. He would lie with his muzzle resting upon his paws, or sit alert like a stone dog on a pedestal.

If love is blind, hate has quick ears, and down at Mustapha Farm the news reached Marie Proyart:

"Monsieur York is to be a father."

Marie's child had been born. When the nurse had first shown it to the father, Proyart had stared at the infant with a look of astonishment and of horror.

"*Ma foi!*"

For the child's face was disfigured by a purple nævus that covered the whole of one cheek and a part of the forehead.

"*Pauvre petite!*"

"What is it, a girl?"

"Yes; a girl."

Proyart had been drinking, and he had turned away with an oath.

"Just my luck! A girl! And with a face like that. Good Lord!"

Obviously, Marie's marriage was not all oil and honey. With a child that was hideous, and a husband who had taken to drinking, she had nothing to boast about, though Louis could be kept in

order when Marie was up and doing. She was very much the dominant partner, a woman who was both hard and sensual, and Proyart was afraid of her. She intended him to make money, for he was a capable fellow; therefore she had informed him that it was his business to keep sober.

"One day a month you may drink as hard as you please, *mon garçon*; but in between — no."

The news from the Villa York filled Marie with an evil and secret rage. No longer could she feel herself somehow superior to that other woman, and sneer at *L'Anglaise*, that bit of butter and milk. Her venom was ineffectual, and therefore emulative. It became like a sac of poison — distended, painful.

Ill-wishing did not relieve her, for Marie was of a practical turn of mind. She liked tangible results.

"If the brat could be born — deformed."

Which unpleasant thought was but a reflection upon her own unfortunate child, and her malice was the more embittered by it.

XIII

DURING the heat of the day Elizabeth would retire to her "grotto." It made her smile, this cave cut into the slope of the hillside, piled about and roofed with blocks of stone, and planted with green things, and filled with the coolness of its little fountain.

"What a boy's idea," she thought.

It seemed to her that the eternal boy in Byron York had conceived and carried out this most quaint of garden-houses where she could lie in her long chair, protected by this mass of stone. Most men would not have come by such an inspiration, or would have been too self-conscious to carry it out had the inspiration come to them.

"That uxorious fool, York."

Later in the day, when the sun was nearing the hills, Elizabeth would wander to her shelter under the pine trees where the cypresses raised a green wall. She was in the open here, and able to look over the great plain, and at the greyness of the mountains whose tops would grow all rosy at sunset.

York would bring his coffee out here, and they would sit and

watch the stars or the rising moon. Sometimes the plaintive music of Arab pipes would come to them out of the still night. The smoke from York's cigar would make faint grey spirals.

They would talk quietly of intimate things, or not trouble to talk at all, for the understanding between them was as tranquil as the African night.

Below them, in the plain, the little town of Mida would show up as a blurr of faint light in the surrounding darkness.

In one of the wine-shops of Mida, a blind Frenchman played a violin, and girls and men danced, with solemn Arabs and negroes and Kabyles sitting watching on the wooden benches. Here, Louis Proyart came to swagger as the *proprietaire*, and as the man with money. The girls made a fool of him, especially when he had begun to grow merry and sentimental — and the Arabs would study his bombastic antics like sages studying the habits of some absurd insect. Proyart would call any man his brother when the red wine was in him, and cheap cognac had begun to work. He would go about treating anybody and everybody, loving the whole world, and never growing quarrelsome.

An intoxicated man may blunder into all sorts of friendships and situations, and one September night Marie heard her man upon the road after one of his permitted excursions to Mida. He was singing, and he was talking, and it appeared that he was not alone.

Marie stood in the doorway. Two figures arrived at the gate, and one of them was the figure of an Arab. She saw the white burnous and haik. Her husband had an arm over the Arab's shoulders, and while embracing him was being supported by the tall white figure. They paused at the gate, Proyart declaiming with drunken emotion:

"My house — dear friend. At your service. Madame — my wife — a warm welcome. Oh, la-la, we understand each other — I think."

Marie concluded that the reveller had been helped home by some Arab neighbour, but when the two arrived at the doorway she was made to realize that there was method in her husband's madness. The little flame of cunning had not been quenched.

"*Ma chérie*, permit me to introduce Omar Ben Ali. A friend — yes —— Make him welcome. He is here at Mida on a little private business. He speaks but little French."

The dark eyes under the haik met the Frenchwoman's.

"Enter, Omar Ben Ali," she said.

She felt her husband's hand on her shoulder; he was grinning; and his squint had a fantastic eloquence.

"Speak the native lingo. That's it. It is worth your while to make him comfortable. I have had a bit of luck."

Omar was given a chair, cigarettes, coffee. He was told that he could sleep in the house, and during all these politenesses he watched the pair with a fanatical and half suspicious gravity.

Proyart, hilarious, was dragged by his wife into their bedroom.

"Idiot! What is the meaning of this?"

"Idiot, indeed!"

He took it as a magnificent joke.

"I tell you the gentleman has come here on private business. Business up at the Villa York, *ma chérie*. They shot a man up there a few weeks ago."

And then Marie understood.

XIV

HOW these two came to understand each other was something of a mystery, but understand each other they did. A common hatred linked them together, and a native cruelty that both shared.

Omar was a very tall man, and he had brought a gun with him, the stock and barrel separate hidden under his burnous. For two days he lodged at the Mustapha Farm, never appearing outside the house. He would sit on a low stool close to Marie's stove, smoking endless cigarettes, like a holy man sunk in meditation, and now and again he would look up at her with melancholy and fanatical eyes.

Marie Proyart knew what was in his mind. She shared his hatred, encouraged it, and in encouraging it, sought to control and direct it. She would study the lines of his expressive and cruel mouth, and try to discover what was going on behind those leaden-coloured eyes.

Omar Ben Ali had come to kill the man who had shot his brother. It was the old law, passionate and primitive, an adventurous duty that the man of his own race demanded. Blood for

blood.

But Omar Ben Ali was more subtle than the ordinary fanatic armed with a gun or a knife. Blood was blood, but why be a butcher when you could be a torturer? A brother had been killed, but was the servant more responsible than the master who had given his servant a gun to kill with?

Omar was very cautious with his parleys with the Frenchwoman. He used to watch her eyes, and after a while her eyes convinced him, for what her voice said her eyes said even more fiercely.

"I hate. I wish to hurt — him — the Englishman. But how does one hurt people? With a stick or a stone or a knife. You and I — Omar Ben Ali — know that that is stupid and childish. One strikes at the thing that is dear."

Omar nodded his head, and watched the smoke rise from his cigarette.

"An ass can kick blindly," he said; "a man should know how and where a blow should fall."

Proyart, in a state of fuddlement, yet had moments of suspicion. He would come in from the fields, and find the tall white figure squatting by the stove.

"What are you two plotting — hey?"

"The death of Mahomet."

"Lord, what's that to do with you? Why doesn't the fellow go out with his gun and finish it? I am tired of him hanging about here."

"Who brought him here, *chéri*?" she asked sweetly.

Her husband did not go beyond words, for Marie had a method of persuasion that never failed, and so Omar Ben Ali continued to sit by the stove. Life interested him, life and the motives of this woman who was trying to persuade him to do the very thing he was inclined to do. She was ready to tell him just how it could be done.

"Can you shoot straight, Omar?"

"When I wish to."

He reached out and plucked at her skirt with thumb and forefinger. When he smiled his mouth took the shape of the crescent.

"Why does madame wish it?"

"Because I hate."

"Why does madame hate?"

She looked down into the intelligent and cruel face.

"I will show you."

And going into the next room she lifted the child out of the cradle, and bringing it to Omar Ben Ali, showed him its blotched and purple face.

"The Englishman miswished me, and put the evil eye upon me when I was with child. You see, the little one carries the evil wish on its face. Do you wonder that I do not mean his child to be born?"

Omar Ben Ali smiled, and fingered his chin.

"So — my hatred is useful to madame. Let us make a bargain."

XV

YORK had been writing letters. He was standing at the window of his little *cabinet d'étude,* as men stand at windows in some happy moment to look out at life, and find it good.

His window showed him the southern slope of the garden, with its white boundary wall, and groups of cypresses and pines. The great plain was a sheet of gold, and above it the grey breasts and peaks of the mountains were reflecting the sunset. To the right the gradual slope of a broad path led York's glance to the low growing and spreading pine and the group of cypresses where his wife lay propped up in her long chair. He saw her white dress, and the red cushions, and the brown cover of the book she was reading. A tawniness beside the chair was the body of Jean the mastiff stretched out — and apparently asleep.

York's eyes rested on the figure of his wife.

"What a lottery — marriage!" he thought, as thousands of men have thought before him. "I was restless, and I married a woman. There was something wiser in me than I knew."

And on this tranquil September evening, in this land of the vintage, scorched in the summer, but gentle and perfumed in the autumn to the spring he felt that his fate was beneficent. The stately shadows of the trees, but not a shadow athwart his consciousness.

Bess was strong and happy; she would go through her woman's ordeal like the healthy and beloved comrade that she was. The

doctor had told him that there was nothing to fear.

His glance travelled towards the mountains, but in the mid-distance something arrested it. He saw the white outline of the garden wall suddenly broken by a white excrescence thrusting up beside the green spire of a cypress. A man was pulling himself on to the top of the wall. The sunlight glinted on a line of metal.

York stood a moment, wondering, and then made a quick movement to the gun-rack behind the door. He kept a rifle there, ready loaded. He was back at the open window, and in the act of raising the rifle when the man on the wall fired.

York's shot was like a reflex act, and yet it was controlled by the sudden steeliness of a man in the presence of some unforeseen horror. As he climbed out of the window, he had a glimpse of a white shape lying doubled up over the wall like a white garment hung there, but for the moment that other death did not concern him. He was running down the path. He could see Bess sitting up, with the book pressed against her bosom. He was aware of a moment of most horrible suspense. He expected to see the white figure sink suddenly.

"Bess——"

She looked at him wide-eyed, and with a kind of shocked bewilderment.

"Oh — Ronny — poor Jean——!"

York's face underwent an extraordinary change. He saw the mastiff stretched out, with a trickle of red coming from under his muzzle.

"My dear——!"

"Poor Jean sprang up suddenly. He was in front of me. Something struck me——"

She was still holding the book pressed against her body, and half imbedded in the cover York saw Omar Ben Ali's bullet.

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